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Takehaya
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二重国の冒険者!?

健速
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六畳間の侵略者!? 3

た03-02-03

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六畳間の侵略者!? 3

HJ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

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商店街の福引で、海辺の温泉宿泊券を手に入れた一行は、一〇六号室をめぐる攻防戦をいったん休止、真夏のバカンスへと繰り出した。だがそれは、仕掛けられた罠だったのだ！浜辺ではしゃぐ美少女軍団（＋α）に忍び寄るあやしげな影。果たしてその視線の先にいるのは誰なのか!?そんな圧縮系ラブコメディ第3巻。今回は、感動をお届けしま……す？

HOBBY JAPAN

六畳間の侵略者!? 3

真夏の海の視線クギヅケ♪

（除く1名）

海を見るキリハの横顔は不思議と優しげだった。
だが彼女が一番優しい瞳をするのは……

亜わらぬ我ら！

ころな荘二〇六号室

もくじ

七月十日（金）

ゲームと福引き……007

八月十一日（月）

陰謀の海水浴……062

八月十一日（月）

レアカードとカブトムシ…119

八月十二日（火）

早苗の危機……156

八月十二日（火）

労働組合の反乱……209

八月二十二日（土）

ダンジョンと宝物……283

あとがき……300

ころな荘の関係者たち

主人公

里見孝太郎

ころな荘一〇六号室の、いちおうの借主で主人公。

悪友

松平賢治

孝太郎の幼なじみで親友。

先輩

桜庭晴海

孝太郎の所属する編み物部の部長で、一年先輩。ちょっと病弱。

大家

笠置静香

孝太郎の同級生でころな荘の大家さん。

東本願早苗
想い出のころな荘一〇六号室に取り憑き、独占を狙う幽霊。
幽霊
クラノ＝キリハ
一〇六号室を祭壇化、それを足がかりとして地上侵略を狙う地底人。
地底人
虹野ゆりか
自称〝魔法少女〟。一〇六号室に危機が迫っていると主張する。
コスプレイヤー？
ティアミリス・グレ・フォルトーゼ
皇位継承の試練のため一〇六号室とその住人の支配を狙う宇宙人。
ルースカニア・ナイ・パルドムシーハ
ティアの付き人で世話係。
宇宙人

Rokujouma no Shinryakusha Volume 03

written by Takehaya

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Games and Lottery

Part 1

Friday, July 10th

Entering July, Koutarou and the other residents of room 106 could feel summer approaching.

Cicadas could be heard crying from outside as the strong sunlight entering the room raised the temperature.

The temperature was even higher with seven people crowding in a small six tatami mat room.

“Waaaaa! Blue Knight dieeeeeed!!”

“Well, if you keep pushing deep into the dungeon it was bound to happen”

“Tell me pleb! How do I save Blue Knight!?”

“Form a rescue party and get to where Blue Knight died”

“Alright, I'll give it a try! Stay here and give me advice, pleb!”

“I got it, just calm down. It's just a game”

“As if I could calm down! My Blue Knight died you know!? Ahh, getting lazy and calling the magicians Yurika backfired!”

“That's a false accusation!”

The temperature in the room was even higher because of the worn-out console attached to the TV.

Koutarou had gotten his parents to buy him the console when he was young in order to keep up to date and he had gotten so attached to it he brought it with him to room 106.

And after Ruth found it while cleaning the wardrobe, it led to the current situation.

“You need useful members for a rescue mission so leave the low levels behind. You won't need a thief either”

“And what about the equipment!?”

“It's common for the rescue party to get stranded as well, so use the best equipment that you have available”

“I see, then let's go!”

Coming from a different planet, Theia showed interest in the console.

At first she was startled, but as she picked up a controller she behaved just like a kid playing a game for the first time.

Ever since then, she had Koutarou accompany her as she went on adventures.

“But to think Theia would be interested in a game this old...”

Sanae was amazed by Theia's behavior.

As she saw Theia holding the controller, Sanae gave Theia a cold glance.

“Fufu. Her Highness does love competition. In fact, she loves most games, but this time is special”

“What do you mean?”

On the other hand, Ruth and Kiriha were warmly watching over her.

The two of them were sitting down by the tea table drinking tea while gently staring at Koutarou and Theia playing games.

“Actually, back when her highness was in school she was researching computer history. Which is why her highness has a special interest in early games”

“A research project... at her age?”

Shizuka showed a surprised expression.

Having nothing to do, she had joined Ruth and Kiriha for some tea.

“The Forthorthe royalties has always been encouraged to study literature and military art. So it is tradtion to finish their university research projects before starting their trial”

“So you mean it's a custom in Forthorthe... Customs are rough no matter where you go”

Kiriha brought her teacup to her mouth as she smiled wryly.

Kiriha had her own opinions on customs but she chose not to mention them, and Ruth didn't notice the slight change in her expression.

“Being a princess really must be rough...”

Shizuka sips on her tea as she admired Theia.

In the warm room, the cold tea quenched Shizuka's thirst.

“Amongst the large history of computers, her highness chose to focus on games”

What did it mean to use computers to play?

With that starting point and the following development, she would analyze the current situation and predict future developments.

Theia's research started from explaining a single game and ended by discussing media theory.

Her diverse research received high acclaims in the university.

“Forthorthe's history is over 2000 years long, so the oldest game still in existence is far more advanced than Earth's games. Which is why one of the earliest games of this planet is almost like a legendary treasure for her highness.”

“I see, so Theia-dono doesn't just love games as a hobby, but it's also thanks to her research project”

“Exactly”

“Haaa... I'm glad I wasn't born a princess”

As Kiriha, Ruth and Shizuka were chatting, Theia's and Koutarou adventured continued.

“Hey, Tulip. Yurika B is about to die”

“I don't care. Leave her be. I don't have the potions to spare”

“Oh, then all is good”

“It's not all good!! Please heal her!!”

“I refuse”

“Whyyyyy!?”

Yurika had joined Theia and Koutarou on their adventure before anyone noticed.

The three of them were fussing over what to do while staring at the TV.

“And you too Koutarou, you're already a high school student, what are you doing...”

Sanae was left amazed by the three.

However, Sanae was just unhappy being left out.

But she wasn't mature enough to be honest and join the group.

“I quite like her highness and Satomi-sama getting along like that”

“They're both just kids, geez”

She couldn't join them even though she wanted to, because of that Sanae had been glaring at Koutarou's back for quite a while.

Despite what she was saying, Sanae was the most childish of them.

“A magician without mana is useless, just like you”

“She'll be of use! Just stay at an inn and recover her mana, please! And I'm not useless either! I really am a magical girl!!”

“A magical girl, right...”

Yurika desperately tried to plea her case.

“W-What-”

“How about you face reality already?”

Koutarou turned away from the TV and turned his attention towards Yurika.

Yurika flinched and objected as Koutarou gave her a cold glance.

“The reality!? I really am a magical girl!

“It's already July and those enemies you mentioned are nowhere to be seen”

“They'll come! They'll definitely show up!”

Feeling the sincerity from Yurika's desperate appeal, Koutarou remembered something.

“...Does that have anything to do with next month’s Comiha?”

Comic Heart Network, or Comiha for short.

It was a manga related event that will be held next month, the largest event in the world for cosplayers.

Koutarou figured Yurika was desperate because she and her cosplay friends would be having a showdown at that event.

“It has nothing to do with that! Why does it always turn into cosplay!?”

“That's because it's cosplay no matter how you look at it”

Sanae butted in, she had a gentle look of sympathy.

“D-Don't look at me with pity please!!”

“That's because I'm pitying you”

“Well, just wait a little, Sanae”

“Koutarou?”

“Yurika, you won't admit it if we just do this like always. It's about time you understand it too”

As he said that Koutarou put his hand into his clothes and began searching for something.

“What? What's happening?”

Interested, Theia threw the controller away and approached the tea table.

“Ah, found it...”

Koutarou pulled out two photos from his inner pocket and put them on top of the table.

The other six – Yurika, Sanae, Ruth, Theia, Shizuka and Kiriha peeked at the photographs all at once.

“Ah, it's a picture of me!”

“And that girl- what was her name again?”

“That's Sakuraba-sama, she won the sports festival”

“The sports festival... I just remembered the disgrace I suffered...”

“This photograph was taken pretty well”

“So, what about these two photos, Koutarou?”

Koutarou showed them pictures of Yurika and Harumi.

He pointed at the two photos and opened his mouth.

“Let's pretend out of these two, one is a magical girl”

“Alright, and then?”

“I'm not pretending! I really am a magical girl!”

“Calm down, just open your mind for a while”

“Well, I can't agree but...”

Yurika couldn't agree with Koutarou but she reluctantly withdrew.

Since Yurika backed down, Koutarou continued.

“Let's say one of these two is a magical girl and one is a normal girl. With that in mind, I have a question for you all: who do you think is the magical girl?”

Apart from Yurika the five girls pointed at one of the pictures.

“This is the one you'd expect”

“From personal data I can tell she is mentally strong”

“It's incredibly displeasing to admit, but out of these two, it has to be this one”

“I feel like this person has a mysterious aura around her”

“I'm sorry, Nijino-san...”

The five of them pointed at Harumi's photo without any hint of hesitation.

“Ugu”

Instead, Yurika was the one hesitating.

“T-This is unfair”

If it wasn't Harumi, Yurika would have picked herself immediately.

However, Yurika admired Harumi.

When she got involved, Yurika couldn't choose.

“I think s-she is the magical girl a-as well...”

Yurika's trembling finger pointed at Harumi's photograph.

Her voice trembled like her fingers.

And her expression was unpleasantly distorted.

Yurika also thought that Harumi was a more fitting magical girl.

So she heartbreakingly pointed at Harumi instead of herself.

“Do you understand now, Yurika. Whether you can use magic or not isn't important”

“I know... Even I know I'm not suited for this job... If only the enemy would show up... If only you could see me fight... Then you'd believe me... Hurry up and attack, Darkness Rainbow... Hurry up and disturb the peace and save me...”

Tears streamed down Yurika's cheeks.

“...I believe in love and courage~♪ What's important are the bonds you make~♪”

Yurika started humming a song and vanished into the wardrobe.

“... I know it's a strange thing to say but... Satomi-kun, isn't it about time you believe her?”

A sobbing voice could be heard from the wardrobe.

Shizuka couldn't help but feel pity for Yurika.

“It's getting pretty bad if she's wishing for enemies to come and the peace to be disturbed, don't you think?”

“She is calling herself a magical girl of love and courage after all...”

Harumi would never have wished for enemies to appear.

The real problem was Yurika's personality.

She just wasn't acting like a heroine of justice.

“By the way, Koutarou”

“Hm?”

Called out by Sanae, Koutarou stopped moving as he picked up a photograph from the tea table.

“Where'd you get that photograph?”

“W-What does it matter?!”

Koutarou hurriedly put away the photographs in his pocket.

“It does matter! You showed Yurika's picture to the cosclub but where'd you get Harumi's photograph from! You pervert!”

“T-That's not my intention at all!”

“Then spit it out! When did you take that picture?! You've never taken my picture before!”

Agitated, Sanae grabbed onto Koutarou's neck like always.

“E-Even if I take a picture of you, it'll just turn into a ghost photo!”

“Even then it's unfair!! This is humiliating!”

“S-Stop it, Sanae”

“Take a picture of me damnit!! In fact, just be true to yourself and say 'You're cute Sanae, let's try a more daring pose'!!”

“D-Don't get to full of yourself!”

In order to combat Sanae, Koutarou brought his clenched right fist towards her face.

In his hand was the usual 'Be gone evil spirits' charm.

“Hah, like I'll fall for the same trick again!”

However Sanae bounced her head back and forth like a boxer, dodging Koutarou's fist.

“C-Curse youuu!”

Because he was being choked, Koutarou moved slower than normal.

And since he'd used to charm to blow Sanae away several times before, she had finally learned her lesson.

“Oh my, you always get along so well, Satomi-kun, Sanae-chan”

“You look like you're siblings. Being an only child, I'm quite envious”

Shizuka and Ruth watched over the two with smiles on their faces.

Though Shizuka was strict with fighting in the room, she left those two be.

This didn't count as fighting to Shizuka.

“Hmph, they're both just the same mental age. They're both kids”

Theia was dissatisfied.

As she irritatedly spat out those words, she picked up the controller again, however she didn't have the same happy expression as before.

“... I see, things are getting quite complicated”

Kiriha smiled as she shifted her gaze between Theia and Sanae.

Leaving Koutarou in between them out of it, Theia and Sanae's wills were clashing.

Kiriha could clearly feel it.

“Nyahahaha! Hurting a maiden’s feelings is a sin! As punishment I'll have you pass out!”

“A-As if I'd let you!”

A large boom sounded out.

“Gya!?”

However, in the end Koutarou held the advantage.

Koutarou wasn't holding the charm in his right hand, but in his left.

Being distracted by his right hand, Sanae was easily blown away.

'Family Safety'

The charm Sanae was blown away by had that embroidered into it with golden thread.

“Fufu, Don't expect me to always use the same trick, you fool”

“D-Damn it, using two is, unfair... ugh...”

With smoke rising from her head, Sanae collapsed onto the tatami mat.

“Thank you, grandma!”

Koutarou paid no attention to Sanae and was instead staring at the charms in his hands while thanking his grandmother in the country side.

Part 2

“Well then, it's about to time to go shopping”

As Shizuka watched Koutarou and Sanae playing, she finished the last of her tea and stood up.

Since this was an everyday occurrence, she wasn't worried about Sanae at all.

“Ah, let's go together”

Ruth also stood up, and she quickly grabbed Koutarou's wallet next to the phone.

She was in charge of the budget in room 106.

That was because Koutarou trusted Ruth.

“Are you going shopping, Landlord-san, Ruth-san?”

“Yes, the timed sale at the supermarket by station is about to begin”

“I'll do my best not to lose to the neighborhood wives”

Seeing Shizuka and Ruth standing, Koutarou also got up.

“I'll carry the bags. I have nothing to do anyways”

“W-Wait just a second, pleb! You're planning on leaving your master behind as she's about to go on an adventure and go shopping!?”

Flustered, Theia shook her controller and stopped Koutarou.

However, Koutarou simply shook his head.

“Sorry Tulip. We'll continue when I get back. You can't get by in life by only playing games”

“.... Uuuhh~”

Theia looked at Koutarou with an unsatisfied glance.

It wasn't just her normal piercing glance; instead it had a different nuance.

“Are you sure, Satomi-sama? I could carry it all on my own...”

Ruth noticed her master’s state.

And she tried to persuade Koutarou to stay in the room.

“No can do. If the old man finds out I'm leaving all the housework to a girl I'll get scolded”

However, Koutarou didn't approve of forcing all the housework onto Ruth.

“...”

Noticing that Koutarou wasn't going to change his opinion, Theia turned her back on him.

“That's not what this is about though...”

“Koutarou, are you going shopping!?”

“Yeah”

“I'll go with you! I want to eat takoyaki[1]!”

Ruth tried to continue persuading Koutarou, but gave up after Sanae joined the conversation.

“Well then, let's go”

“... Okay”

“Takoyaki, Takoyaki!”

“Is food all you ever think about, Sanae?”

“It's fine, I'm still growing!”

“No, you're already dead”

[1] A ball-shaped Japanese snack consisting of wheat flour and octopus

With Shizuka in the lead, Koutarou and Sanae left room 106.

Ruth called out to Theia who was playing games on her own.

“I'll be taking my leave for now, your highness”

“....Yeah...”

Theia's answer was short.

Ruth wondered what expression Theia was making right now, but she couldn't tell with Theia's back towards her.

Your highness...

Ruth back away and left room 106.

The only two left in the six mat room was now Theia and Kiriha.

For a while, the only sound in the room came from the game Theia was playing.

10 minutes after Koutarou and the others had left, Kiriha opened her mouth.

“...Was it really alright to not go with them, Theia-dono?”

Theia's hands stopped moving after hearing that question.

“Hmph, why do I have to do something like that!? I'm busy playing games!”

“I see. Well in that case...”

“It's none of your business!!”

Theia shouted at Kiriha and continued playing the game.

And just like she said, her hands busily moved, controlling her character.

However...

However, it didn't look like Theia was enjoying her game.

“But to think Tulip loved games that much”

“She's just a kid”

“There, there, Sanae-chan”

Koutarou and the others were walking down the shopping district while talking about Theia.

They had already finished shopping and Koutarou was carrying most of the luggage.

Now, they were planning on using the lottery ticket they had gotten at the supermarket register and were heading for the edge of the shopping district.

This shopping district connected Kitsushou city and Harukaze city, and the neighborhood had regained much of its vigor thanks to the newly constructed highway.

In order to capture the new customers, the shopping district was in the middle of a lottery campaign.

“Her highness’s love for games is in large part due to her mother’s influence”

“Theia's... mother?”

“Yes, when her highness's mother who is the current emperor, Elfaria-sama, was still a student, her research project was about archeology. Because of her influence, Theia-sama took an interest in computers of the past and began her study”

Learning of her mother’s research theme early on, Theia spent a lot of time when she was young playing with computers, and her research theme naturally became computer history.

Computer technology would get mentioned from time to time in her mother’s research project, and Theia herself excelled at using computers.

“But, choosing games as her theme was because of Theia-chan's hobby right?”

“Yes. That's right”

“Well, she loves competitions...”

And amongst the vast history of computers, Theia took an interest in game software.

Being hot-blooded, this was only natural for her.

Koutarou himself was the same, so he understood her feelings.

“But that is also the reason for her uneasiness. The real Theia-sama is a shy but gentle person”

“...Eh?”

The next words Ruth said surprised Koutarou.

She's shy but gentle...?

To Koutarou, Theia seemed like an arrogant and selfish girl.

But Ruth had called her the complete opposite.

“...With the Forthorthe's system for selecting successors being the way it is, there's been a power struggle inside the royal family since ancient times. The legend of the Blue Knight was a result of one of those power struggles”

Ruth continued with a serious yet grim expression.

Looking at her, Koutarou believed she was telling the truth.

“Her highness is the current emperor’s only child, but as the seventh princess she has many rivals”

Being the emperor’s child didn't mean they were the successor to the throne. Instead, anyone born in any of the royal families was given the chance to become emperor.

They just had to complete their trial before anyone else.

Because of that, the royal families held a strong sense of rivalry against one another.

“On top of that, being unable to align with the conservatists and unable to compromise with the military, there are always suspicious rumors regarding her majesty Elfaria”

“Her mother...”

“This is why her highness always boasted about her own skills since her childhood, to protect herself and her mother. She couldn't lose, whether it was in a game or in a fight”

Since she was the only who had watched over Theia as she fought daily, Ruths words carried great weight.

If that's true, she's been defending her everything using force...

Koutarou felt he understood Theia a little better after listening to Ruth's explanation.

“Her Highness probably named her personal warship Blue Knight for the same reason. She probably wants to defend her mother, like the Blue Knight of legends”

“The Blue Knight huh...”

It was the name Theia would always say when she would bring out her weapons.

And this was the reason for it.

I wonder if it would have been better to just stay at home and play games with her instead of going shopping...

That sudden thought entered Koutarou's mind.

He remembered that Theia had called the game’s hero Blue Knight.

However, the very next moment he shook his head.

No, no, what am I thinking, being merciful!? I need to chase her out! I can't bother with her feelings! What am I doing getting along with her!?

As Koutarou was puzzled about his own feelings, Ruth smiled towards him, and as the evening sun lit her face up, her expression left a warm and gentle impression.

“But her highness has changed a bit since she came to this planet. And from time to time, she behaves like a girl of her age should. This is all thanks to Satomi-sama”

“M-Me?”

“Yes”

Koutarou stared in wonder as Ruth smiled and nodded.

“Satomi-sama has no interest in Forthorthe. As such you'd normally have no reason to fight, so there is no worry of assassination attempts. Satomi-sama is the first person her highness has met that she can trust”

“Well I don't care about her status or position, but when it comes to room 106 we share an interest”

“...Koutarou, Theia probably wants an opponent she can fight with”

Sanae who had been quiet up until this point opened her mouth.

But at that same time she was in a bad mood.

“I think it's just as Sanae-sama said. Her highness has never had an equal she could quarrel with before”

“...Someone she can fight with, in that case I can kind of understand”

In Koutarou's case it was the difference between having Kenji in his life or not.

Having an equal he could fight with changed how much he had in life.

“That is why I want Satomi-sama to continue defending room 106”

“Eh?”

“Why!?”

Koutarou had been surprised by what Ruth had said before, but this time he was left speechless.

Those words were just too inappropriate for someone who was supposed to be Theia's ally.

This didn't just surprise Koutarou and Sanae, but also Shizuka.

“Why is that, Ruth-san?”

Koutarou and Sanae's jaws dropped, so instead Shizuka asked Ruth a question.

Ruth smiled lightly and slowly explained herself.

“Her Highness gaining control of room 106 would mean she would return back to Forthorthe. And she would return to a life where she can never let her guard down. Before that, I want her highness to live life as a normal girl for a while”

Those were not the words of Theia's vassal, but of her childhood friend.

That was what Ruth wished from the bottom of her heart.

Ruth wanted Theia to be happy more than she wanted her to become emperor.

“Hmm, you have quite the responsibility there, Satomi-kun”

Shizuka smiled and tapped Koutarou's back.

“If you lose, Theia will go home, so hang in there!”

“I have no intention of losing anyways. That room is mine”

After hearing about Theia's situation, the thought of losing did cross Koutarou's mind, but after hearing Ruth's intention he felt the opposite.

It's fine the way it is now! That room is mine!

As Ruth said, Koutarou not losing right away was the best for Theia, so he had no reason to hesitate.

It was fine with things the way they were, that way the end results would be better for everyone.

“Well said, Satomi-kun! I'll support you from the shadows!”

“Fufufuf, Nahahahaha! That's right, something was wrong with me! Even thinking of losing is not befitting of me!”

As Koutarou decided on what to do, he completely regained his motivation.

“...Please continue treating her highness like normal, Satomi-sama”

Ruth bowed gently towards Koutarou.

And when she raised her head again, traces of tears could be seen in her eyes.

The tears were shining orange, dyed by the evening sun, and left a deep impression in Koutarou.

They were a symbol of her gratitude to Koutarou and her relief that her childhood friend would be able to spend some more time in peace.

“I'll beat her to a pulp though”

“Yes. Please do”

She's really beautiful...

Koutarou unintentionally admired her.

And because she could smile like this, Koutarou felt he had made the right choice.

“Koutarou... you...”

Sanae was the only one with a clouded expression amongst them.

That was because she could sense the change occurring in Koutarou.

Sanae had thought it was strange for a while now.

Koutarou and Theia would never have played games together when they first met.

But at the end of the sports festival as they were running away from Shizuka and Kenji, they ended up like this.

And looking at those two, Sanae couldn't help but feel uneasy.

“Why am I... this...”

Sanae's heart was throbbing in pain.

At first it was barely noticeable, but the pain grew stronger each day.

And as she felt Koutarou's change right now, the pain felt like her heart was being stabbed with a knife.

From the day she had felt this pain, Sanae hated getting blown away by Koutarou's charm.

She felt she was being rejected as she was blown away.

And she was reminded that Koutarou only thought of her as an evil spirit haunting his room.

Even though she knew that was reality.

“...What does it matter if Koutarou thinks I'm just an evil spirit, I've chased everyone out like that up until now!”

Sanae talked to herself, but no matter how many times she said the same thing she didn't feel any better.

Part 3

“There it is, over there. This way, Ruth-san,”

“Okay, Satomi-sama”

When Koutarou and the others arrived at the lottery tent, they found that there was no one other than the clerk in charge there.

Thanks to that, there was no line.

“Hmm, it's not the scraping kind but the spinning kind”

“There were prices from first to fifth place”

The lottery at the tent was a wheel you would spin using a knob and a marble would fall out.

Five types of marbles could fall out, gold, silver, copper, white and red, and they corresponded to the five prices.

Gold was first prize, tickets to a hot spring.

Silver was second prize, an LCD TV.

Copper was third prize, a bike.

White was fourth prize, a set of canned fruits.

And red was the participation prize, pocket tissues.

“These prices sure are luxurious for a lottery in a shopping district...”

“Welcome! Are you here to spin the wheel?”

The clerk in charge of the lottery was an easy going man.

The flashy red happi[2] he was wearing gave off a frivolous impression.

“Yes, that's right. But it won't be me but this girl... Go on, Ruth-san”

“Kya!?”

Koutarou grabbed Ruth's hand as she was looking around the tent and pulled her in front of the lottery wheel.

“S-Satomi-sama?”

“Since we're already here, why don't you give a shot, Ruth-san. You won't get that many chances unlike the rest of us”

“...U-Uhm...”

Ruth was puzzled having been dragged in front of the lottery wheel all of a sudden, but she was even more puzzled that Koutarou had grabbed her right hand.

Having recently shown her tears, Ruth was extra conscious of Koutarou and couldn't stop her cheeks from blushing.

“Is this lady your girlfriend? I'm envious that you have such a cute girlfriend”

“I know right. I would have no complaints if she was my girlfriend either”

“I guess it won't go that easily”

“Nahahaha, exactly!”

[2] Japanese straight-sleeved coat imprinted with a distinctive crest, usually worn on festivals.

“Reality is harsh isn't it, wahahaha!”

Koutarou and the clerk were laughing loudly, but Ruth was not in a state of mind where she could laugh.

Ruth was born from a noble family and had spent most of her time in a girls-only officers school so she was unused to men.

It was of course the first time a man had grabbed her hand.

“... I...”

Ruth, whose face was dyed deep red, stiffened up and just stared at Koutarou in front of her.

“Ruth-san, is something wrong?”

Koutarou looked back at Ruth.

Because of that they were now staring at each other from close range, and Ruth was getting cornered.

If I stretch... we're close enough... to... k-kiss...

As Ruth was seconds away from exploding brain began creating odd thoughts, and Shizuka who was nearby freed Ruth from Koutarou's hand.

“Satomi-kun, can't you tell Ruth-san is troubled!?”

Ah...

Thanks to that, Ruth’s brain began to cool down.

“You can't just casually grab a girl’s hand like that!”

“Ah, S-sorry. I just happened to act like I do around Mackenzie”

“L-Lottery, that's right, I still have to do the lottery!”

As Ruth cooled down she couldn't help but remember her embarrassing thoughts just a moment ago.

Because of that, she started to heat right back up.

“Hey lady, because you have three tickets you need to spin three times”

“Y-Yes!”

Being unable to think properly, Ruth spun the lottery wheel with all of her might.

Normally, the marbles would only fall out one at a time, but because the wheel was moving too fast, instead, three marbles dropped out simultaneously.

The colors of the three marbles that fell out were gold, silver and copper.

“Congratulaaatiooons! First prize, second prize and third price! A triple bingo!!”

The man’s voice and the bell he was holding in his hand rang out across the shopping district.

All three marbles were all big hits.

“A-Amazing! Is this what you call beginner’s luck!?”

“A complete sweep of first to third prize!?”

“Ruth, you're amazing!”

Because of this unthinkable situation, Koutarou, Shizuka and Sanae showered Ruth with compliments and applause.

“A-Again! I'm spinning three times!”

However Ruth kept spinning, oblivious to the fact that the lottery was over.

After the commotion at the lottery died down and Koutarou and the rest had left the shopping district, the cashier at the supermarket came running for some reason.

“Aniki, how'd it go?”

The cashier was covered in sweat.

The fat cashier was out of breath having only run from the supermarket.

“Hey Hachi! Rejoice, everything went just according to plan!”

The clerk welcomed the cashier with a smile.

As the fat cashier stood in front of the thin clerk, their appearances contrasted, making the clerk look even thinner.

“So the tickets made their way into their hands then?”

“That’s right, now all we have to do is wait for them to walk right into our trap!”

“As expected from you, Aniki!”

The cashier and clerk were acquaintances.

And they were pleased with having succeeded at something.

“Although, them taking the LCD TV and bike too was a miscalculation...”

“Eeeeeeh!? They took that as well!?”

“It was a miscalculation. The girl who was spinning had abnormal luck”

“I can't believe it... that TV and bike were supposed to become ours after we were done with this fake lottery... Since it's a fake lottery it would have been fine to just fill it with red marbles apart from first price...”

“It's all about the reality! If there aren't prizes lined up at the lottery nobody would take it seriously!”

“I can't watch TV using reality! And I can't ride the bike either!”

“But who would think they would get the second and third prize out of 100 marbles...”

“I guess there really are people blessed by God...”

The two of them looked at each other and lowered their heads and shoulders.

However, the clerk quickly shook his head and pulled himself together.

He tapped the cashiers shoulder.

“Don't lose heart, Hachi! This is nothing!”

“But Aniki! The TV! The bike!”

“Did you forget? Once our 'It's the ocean, Yahoo! Ghost capture operation' succeeds, we'll be able to buy as many TV's or bikes as we want”

“T-That's right! That's why we did this fake lottery in the first place!”

“Just think of them as sacrifices for the greater good, Hachi! The die has already been thrown!”

“You're right! There's no time to be depressed!”

This lottery was created to hand over the hot spring tickets to Koutarou and the rest. It was a complete fake.

Having observed their behavior patterns, they took up a part-time job at the supermarket.

Then they would wait for Koutarou and the others to come shopping and hand them the fake lottery tickets.

And finally, the lottery wheel had been rigged to give them first prize.

It was all according to the two's plan in order to make them go on a hot springs vacation.

“Kukuku, and if she's bound to the house, she'll be left in the house all alone. And even if she can travel we'll have plenty of traps at the inn”

“You're quite the evildoer, Aniki”

Their goal was to capture Sanae.

If Sanae follows them to the hot springs, they'll set up traps to catch her.

And if she doesn't, they'll just capture her when nobody else is in the house.

Either way, they'll be able to set the date and place, giving them a much better chance than just trying to capture her without a plan.

“We'll capture that stable high density ghost and say goodbye to our life of poverty!”

“We'll be able to graduate from exterminating small fry ghosts and join the celebrities!”

And after they captured Sanae they would sell her for a large amount of money.

“Hip hip hooray”

They were ghost hunters, professionals when it came to ghost extermination.

Part 4

“Sorry for disturbing you when you're celebrating, but I have some truly regrettable information to share”

As Koutarou and the others were celebrating their lottery winnings Kiriha appeared in front of them with a serious face.

“Kiriha-san”

“Yurika collapsed”

As they entered room 106 Yurika had collapsed in the middle of the room.

“Waaaaaah, Yurikaaaaa!”

Seeing Yurika, Koutarou rushed into the inner room.

“She entered the closet in this kind of temperature and it seems to have been too much for her”

Yurika had passed out because she had shut herself into the wardrobe during this hellish heat.

Even though it was just the beginning of July, the constant strong sunlight shining into the room had turned into a sauna.

“Is she an idiot? You'd figure out what would happen if you'd just stop and think for a second”

“I wonder why Nijino-san didn't come out despite the heat...”

Sanae was dumbfounded and Shizuka tilted her head in confusion.

The two of them had completely forgotten that Yurika had shut herself into wardrobe because she had gotten depressed.

“Pull yourself together, Yurika!”

“S-Shatomi-shan...?”

As Koutarou shook her shoulders, Yurika opened her eyes.

Yurika was covered in sweat and her bangs were stuck to her face, blocking her view.

Koutarou reached out his hand and moved the bangs away.

“S-Shorry...”

“Why are you always this useless?!”

“I'm fhine. Jusht leave me alone. I'll recover afhter a while”

“As if I could do that!”

Koutarou laid Yurika back down and began preparations to nurse her back to health.

He pulled out several towels from the wardrobe, put water and ice in a washing bowl and grabbed a bottle of drinking water from the fridge.

Yurika followed Koutarou with her glance.

“Yurika, do you have a headache or anything like that?”

As Koutarou was washing Yurika's face off with the cold, wet towel he worriedly stared into her eyes.

“No, I'm fhine”

“What about water? Are you thirsty?”

“I'll drink some afhter a while...”

“I see... rest easily, Yurika”

“Yesh...”

Yurika couldn't move her tongue properly but her answer was clear.

Seeing that, Koutarou let out a sigh of relief.

For shome reashon Shatomi-shan ish being nice...

That thought crossed Yurika's mind as she looked at Koutarou smiling.

I can't get him to believe in magic like alwaysh but it fheelsh like he'sh treating me better than befhore... Ish it jusht my mishunderstanding?

In reality, it wasn't Yurika's misunderstanding, but the truth.

Koutarou was certainly treating Yurika better.

“Don't do something stupid and make Sakuraba-senpai worry”

“Yesh... I undershtand...”

Koutarou had changed how he interacted with Yurika ever since the sports festival.

That was because Yurika had unexpectedly made friends with Harumi.

If she had just been a noisy cosplayer he would probably have left her be, but since she was Harumi's friend he couldn't.

That was because if something were to happen to Yurika, Harumi was sure to worry.

So Koutarou had put the magical girl business aside and treated Yurika as being Harumi's friend.

Which was why he would nurse her when she collapsed, and if she got hungry, he would feed her.

It wasn't purely for Yurika's sake but as a result he ended up treating her better.

“You really are...”

Koutarou picked up a nearby fan and began cooling off Yurika.

“I'm shorry fhor making you washte your time on me...”

Yurika revealed a small smile as the cool breeze washed over her.

Seeing that, Koutarou determined that Yurika was okay.

Ruth approached the two.

“Is Yurika-sama alright?”

Being a proper person, Ruth was worrying about Yurika who had essentially self-destructed.

Ruth furrowed her brows and peered at Yurika.

“I think she's fine. She's usually pretty tough”

“Shorry fhor making you worry~”

“No, I'm just glad you're okay. We'd be unable to celebrate winning the lottery if you fell ill”

Ruth smiled as she pulled out the tickets from her pocket.

“What's that?”

As Ruth entered the room, Theia let go of her controller and headed towards Yurika.

“Your highness, when we went shopping we received some lottery tickets and won tickets to a hot spring”

“Lottery?”

Being raised as a princess, Theia had no idea what lottery was and she looked at Koutarou next to her.

“It was a campaign to raise income to the supermarket, and the customers have a chance of winning presents”

“Oh, I see...”

Ruth hands over the tickets to Theia and she examined them thoroughly..

“That's right, would all of you like to go to the hot springs together?”

Ruth smiled and asked.

“Are you okay with us tagging along with you, Ruth-san?”

When Shizuka asked her that question, Ruth gave her a big nod.

“There are tickets for six, and me and her highness only make two. Besides, vacations are more fun with more people, and we're still not used to living on Earth”

“You're going to bring them with us!?”

Theia pulled her eyes away from the tickets and stared in wonder.

“Yes. I think it would be perfect to leave our daily fights behind and refresh for a while”

Ruth as she answered Theia.

Theia stared at Ruth for a while before looking at the rest of the people in the room.

Ruth, Sanae, Shizuka, Yurika, Kiriha and when she looked at Koutarou's face, she slightly blushed and turned her face away.

“...T-They're the tickets you won. Do with them as you wish”

“Thank you, your highness”

After saying her thanks to Theia, Ruth called out to Koutarou and the others.

“So how about it everyone? Wouldn't you like to come with us to the hot springs?”

“In that case, I'll gladly tag along♪”

“I'll come, I'll come! I want to jump into the hot springs!”

“I have no objections. It's been a while since I took a break”

Shizuka, Sanae and Kiriha all agree right away”

“Ish it okay ifh I come too~”

Still lying down, Yurika worriedly raised her hand.

Yurika who was shunned daily, couldn't help but ask.

“It's impossible isn't it? There are only tickets for six of us”

As Sanae said that she started counting the people in the room.

Sanae, Koutarou, Ruth, Theia, Shizuka, Kiriha added up to six.

There was no room for Yurika.

“That'sh...”

Hearing Sanae's answer, tears began streaming down Yurika's face.

“Sho you're shaying magical girlsh can't go to the hot springsh! Ugh...”

“In that case, it'll be settled if I stay behind. I'll leave the vacation to you girls”

“S-Shatomi-shan, are you sure!?”

Surprised by Koutarou's gentle words, Yurika jumped up on her feet.

“I've alwaysh known you were a nice person shince we fhirsht met!!

Yurika's eyes sparkled as she grabbed Koutarou's hand and shook it.

“You sure are selfish...”

“Eeeeh!? Why can't we just leave Yurika behind!?”

“We can't have that. Look carefully, it says we only have one room on them. I can't sleep in the same room as five girls”

“He's right. Satomi-kun you sure are perceptive...”

On the ticket there was a small writing saying the six people would share one room.

”...Okay, I have something to say”

At that moment, Kiriha who had been thinking for all this time opened her mouth.

“I see no problems going with the seven of us”

“But Kiriha-san, there's only tickets for six of us”

“I know. Which is why only six of us will be customers. Me, Koutarou, Theia-dono, Ruth, Shizuka and Yurika. That adds up to six. No problems”

“W-Wait just a minute! What about me!?”

“...I don't think the inn can charge a ghost”

There were seven in the room but, in reality only six of them needed tickets.

“Ahahahaha, T-That's right. I'm a ghost. I completely forgot”

“This is great, Satomi-sama. Now all of us can go”

Ruth smiled at Koutaruo, but he shook his head.

“Ruth-san, I really can't go. You're all young girls”

“What does it matter? It won't be very different from how we always do”

“It will”

Normally only Koutarou and Yurika slept in room 106.

And Yurika slept in the closet, so technically speaking they weren't in the same room.

“It'll be fine, Satomi-kun. We're just sharing a room”

“Landlord-san, not you too!”

As the only two people with common sense were trying to convince Koutarou he began to panic.

“Or do you think you'll be able to do something indecent to any of us and survive, Satomi-kun?”

“Ugh”

If Koutarou tried to do something to Kiriha, Theia, Ruth or Shizuka, he'd probably not survive.

And Sanae was out of the question.

This left only the cosplayer Yurika, but Koutarou didn't want to do anything to her for several reasons.

And even if he did, the other five would beat him to a pulp.

“T-That's true, but...”

“See? Then it's settled!”

Koutarou found himself unable to argue against Shizuka as she forcibly brought the discussion to a close.

“Ah, Landlord-san, wait!”

“Let's enjoy our summer vacation at the beach and hot springs! I'm glad I bought a new swimsuit a few days ago!”

Shizuka's eyes sparkled.

In her mind she was already enjoying her summer vacation at the hot springs.

“Swimsuit? What do you mean?”

Ruth tilted her head in confusion.

And Kiriha began explaining, as Shizuka was in the middle of dreaming.

“The inn we'll be staying at is next to the beach. Leaving the inn, you'll reach the sea in less than three minutes. It's one of their selling points”

“Swimming in the sea...”

Suddenly Ruth's expression got darker.

“What's wrong, Ruth-san”

“Satomi-sama, Ah, no... It's nothing important, I don't have a swimsuit”

“No problem! I have several swimsuits I've bought and never worn, I'll give you those!”

“In that case, there won't be any problems”

“Thank you very much, Shizuka-sama”

With the problem solved, Ruth bowed to Shizuka.

But for some reason, Ruth's expression was not brightening up.

Koutarou normally never noticed these kinds of things, but this time it hit him.

I guess Ruth-san wants to go with her own swimsuit. She is a girl after all...

And as an even rarer occurrence, Koutarou wanted to do something about it.

He wanted to show his gratitude to Ruth who had helped him out daily.

The explanation about the Forthorthe family situation also played a big part in that desire.

“Ruth-san, I'll buy you a new swimsuit”

With the low rent of 5000 yen, Koutarou had some room for luxury.

Buying Ruth a swimsuit wasn't that big of a hit to his budget.

“Eh...”

Ruth stared at Koutarou, trying to figure out the intentions of his words.

“I want to see Ruth-san wearing a risky swimsuit and ogle her body”

“O-Ogle..”

Ruth's cheeks turned red instantly.

At the same time she remembered fantasizing about kissing Koutarou, and her embarrassment multiplied.

“Do you think you can get away with saying something like that!?”

“Of course! In fact, it's duty of a young man!”

However, Ruth noticed Koutarou's eyes were not showing any desire.

Satomi-sama... Are you saying those things on purpose, for my sake...

The moment she noticed, her embarrassment vanished and was replaced by a feeling of happiness.

“I feel like you'll steal my points if I look at you in swimsuits, but Ruth is different! I'll ogle her body with enthusiasm fitting of a man in his teens!”

“U-Uhm... if you're fine with my meager body...

Pierced by pleasant feelings, Ruth smiled.

This was unusual for Ruth but she wanted to rely on Koutarou's good will.

“So... please buy me a swimsuit...”

“Ah, Eh, Ehh!?”

Oddly enough, Koutarou began to panic.

Koutarou had been speaking the way he did in order for Ruth to agree without feeling bad, but Ruth showed no signs of disgust and instead obediently accepted his offer.

“Fufu. Surprisingly you have a good side to you, Koutarou”

“As expected from Satomi-kun, a japanese man!”

Kiriha, with her sharp observations and Shizuka, who had remembered the discussion before the lottery, had understood Koutarou’s intentions.

“I just—”

“It's fine, we know you're embarrassed! Ruth-san, let's go shopping first thing tomorrow!”

“Ah, yes”

Geez... Next time I'll need to do it more subtly...

Having been seen through by Kiriha and Shizuka, Koutarou let out a heavy sigh.

It was more embarrassing having been seen through.

“Ah, Uhm...”

At that moment, Koutarou noticed that Theia was fiddling with her fingers and staring at him.

“What is it, Tulip?”

As Koutarou asked her, Theia's cheeks turned red and she barely managed to whisper her next words.

“U-Uhm... I don't... have a, s-swimsuit...”

Ah, that's right...

If Ruth didn't have a swimsuit, of course Theia wouldn't have one either.

“I see. That's too bad”

Just a few hours ago, that's surely what Koutarou would have said.

But that's not he said now.

Theia was looking at Koutarou with an embarrassed expression.

Noticing Theia behave like that, Ruth looked at Koutarou as if she was expecting something.

And most of all, looking at the screen behind Theia was the biggest mistake.

What was shown on the screen was the character status menu.

One of the characters 'Yurika B' had a single figure health bar.

She was still out of mana.

It was the same status screen as before Koutarou and the others had gone shopping.

So Tulip hasn't played since then...

Realizing that, Koutarou couldn't simply reject her.

“...I-In that case, if you can save Blue Knight until tomorrow, I'll buy you one too”

Like a normal girl.

The words Ruth said during their shopping echoed in Koutarou's head.

“W-Why are you only discriminating against me! You didn't give Ruth a condition like that!”

“That's because you're always getting your way! Or are you not confident enough that you'll be able to save Blue Knight?”

But even then, Koutarou bullying Theia was his way of hiding his embarrassment.

“What are you talking about!? I'll save Blue Knight right away and make you regret ever challenging me!!”

But Theia might have been the same.

She excitedly turned back towards the TV and picked up the controller.

Weird... Something's wrong with me... Why did I say that I'd buy Tulip a swimsuit...?

Staring at Theia's small back, Koutarou was puzzled about the situation, but he also felt he had to do this.

That was because this was the first time Koutarou had seen Theia as a girl, but Koutarou himself was unable to recognize that and found himself puzzled.

“Satomi-sama... Your highness...”

Watching over the two, Ruth found herself moved to tears.

If only these two would become master and servant.

Ruth who had always been with Theia couldn't help but feel that way.

“W-What a misshtake... ifh I knew it would come to thish I should have bought a swimsuit”

“...I won't buy one for you, no matter what”

“Hauuuuu, t-that'sh just unfair....”

“Pleb! Hurry up and get over here and watch your master’s courage up close!”

“Just be honest and ask for help... geez...”

Unaware of Ruth's emotions, Koutarou and Theia sat themselves down in front of the TV and argued as they continued playing the game.

“Foundation of Forthorthe, the goddess of daybreak, please watch over her highness's future...”

Watching the two's back, Ruth was overwhelmed by emotions and was unable to do anything for a while.

“...”

And one more was overwhelmed by emotions.

That was Sanae, but her emotions were the complete opposite of Ruth's.

Koutarou really is...

Koutarou, Theia and Ruth; watching those three Sanae felt an incredible unease.

She felt she had to do something but she wasn't sure how.

What is happening to me...?

So just like Ruth, she was unable to do anything while watching Koutarou and Theia.

The Beach Conspiracy

Part 1

Monday, August 11th

Theia and Ruth had come to Earth on the large battleship they call the Blue Knight.

Blue Knight took several years to be built and was given to Theia as her personal ship in order to assist her in her trials.

After they reached Earth it had been in orbit ever since.

This one kilometer long battleship had a feature you could tell by just looking at it.

The sky blue hull had the shape of a person.

With that coloring and design, the name Blue Knight was truly fitting.

“H-Huge!! It's huge! You could fit countless room 106’s in here! Tulip, how many tatami mats could fit in here!?”

“Pleb, isn't there anything else that surprises you!? So this is the Blue Knight her Theia-sama is always talking about' or 'As expected from Theia-sama, you command such a fine ship' or something like that!”

Koutarou and the others were in the bridge of the Blue Knight.

They were on their way to the hot springs inn, so they were already wearing their summer clothes and carrying their travel bags.

“Satomi-sama, this bridge could fit about 500 tatami mats♪”

The bridge was positioned in the Blue Knight's head.

But since it was the head of a kilometer long giant, it was surprisingly large.

“Ruth, there's no need to tell them that! More importantly, why do you look so happy!?”

“500!? Tulip, if you live in a place this big, why would you want room 106! That's just unfair!”

“I keep telling you it's for the trial!!”

In the large bridge, Koutarou's and Theia's voices echoed.

The bridge stretched to about 30 meters in all directions and was made from some beautiful, white material.

Inside of that large space was a seat for the operator, the driver and various others. It looked similar to a military command center that you could often see in movies.

“Damn it, if you're a princess then just settle for this huge house!”

“If you understand that I'm a princess then watch your tongue!”

“No, I refuse!”

“In that case I refuse too! I'll stay in that room out of spite if I have too!”

A large sound rang out as Koutarou and Theia butted heads.

The situation was serious, but between Koutarou and Theia this was normal so nobody really minded.

“Hmm, so the other side of that suspicious glowing wall looks like this”

“I knew it was a transfer gate, but to think it's in orbit...”

If they used the glowing blue wall that Theia and Ruth used to travel between room 106 and Blue Knight, they could get to the inn faster than any train or bus.

“Eeeh!? We're in space!?”

“But if we are, then why aren't we floating or swimming in the air?”

“That's thanks to the artificial gravity. We're using Blue Knight’s power to create artificial gravity downwards in the bridge. We could disable it if you like”

“We'll do that some other time. I feel like my hair or clothes will just get messy”

“I see. In that case, please make yourselves comfortable for a while. Meanwhile, we'll replace the gate”

As Ruth said that she manipulated the operator’s panels in order to replace the gate.

The technology Theia and Ruth used to travel through the gate and summon weapons was one and the same.

So, originally, setting a gate and calling out weapons would take the same amount of time.

But in order for humans to pass through, a much higher quality of safety was required.

A weapon could be recreated, but the same could not be said for a person.

Which was why it took some time to open the gate to another place.

But once it had been opened, you could travel freely in between.

“In just a little while we'll open a gate close to the inn”

“Yes, good job”

Having finished her preparations, Ruth returned as Theia thanked her.

Ruth smiled and sat down next to Theia.

Koutarou and the others were sitting at the seats intended for strategy meetings.

It was normally intended for commanders, captains and staff officers, discussing strategies as they read the star and enemy data, but now it was a place for the girls to chat.

There was no tension and snacks had replaced the monitors displaying data.

On top of that, Kiriha's haniwas had made tea and were handing it out.

If the Forthorthe military officers had seen this sight they probably would have cried.

“By the way Theia-dono, I have a question”

Waiting for Ruth to sit down, Kiriha stopped eating her manjū[3] and opened her mouth.

“What?”

“Is it really okay for a battleship, or rather, a large structure made for combat, to have the shape of a person?”

Kiriha's question was simple.

The more complex shape a huge structure had, the lower its structural integrity would be.

Normally, the larger something was, the simpler its design would be.

Despite that, this one kilometer long Blue Knight had the shape of a person.

This could be described as a large weak point for a weapon.

“Good question. You're absolutely correct. This shape is nothing but a weakness”

“Then why?”

“Ruth”

“Yes, your highness”

[3] A traditional Japanese confection

Ruth took over for the more detailed explanation.

Despite her looks, Ruth was a military officer, she knew more about the ship than Theia.

“Basically this appearance is a weakness. The structural integrity is barely enough to support the joints, and it is next to impossible to move during combat”

“So this ship is lacking in calcium”

Listening to the explanation, Sanae hit the desk.

“Sanae-chan, I don't think that's the problem here...”

“However our civilization succeeded in controlling gravity about 150 years ago. Thanks to that, the strength of the ship isn't that important, instead, what’s important is the output of the generator”

“I see, using energy barriers and controlling the ships inertial mass, the shape of the ship doesn't really play that big of a part. It's not like the physical structure of the ship can block this level of weaponry anyways”

Forthorthe's scientific advances had reached level of controlling the weight of objects.

So when taking hits it would get heavier and when moving it would get lighter.

On top of that, Forthorthe's weapons were so powerful, armor would be unable to block the attack using normal means.

No matter how strong of an alloy you made, it wouldn't be able to block a beam cannon.

Because of that, something other than the hull was required for defense.

So what was important wasn't the shape but the amount of energy available.

The generator output was the deciding factor.

“You make up for the calcium shortage with guts”

“Uhm, I think that's slightly wrong as well...”

“That aside, since this ship is human shaped, the generator size is slightly smaller. The surface area is larger and the efficiency of the force fields is not the best. Compared to the other princesses' ships, this ship could be called inferior”

The size of the generator itself played a bigger part than the actual output.

But since the Blue Knight was human shaped, it had a smaller generator compared to other ships of the same size.

“That said, I can't just look for efficiency and fly in a spherical ship”

Theia made an unpleasant expression.

She was slightly irritated that her ideal shape didn't produce her ideal strength.

Trying to optimize the shape of the ship to fit as large of a generator as possible, the ship would naturally become spherical.

In that example the surface area gets smaller, making it more suited for defense as well.

But Theia didn't want to fly in something like that.

“So the sense of beauty is the problem”

“That's right. And it also leaves an impression when appealing to the citizens at ceremonies”

“Really? I think a round space ship would be cute”

Yurika made a circular shape with her fingertip and stated her opinion.

But hearing her say that, Theia lifted her eyebrows.

“Yurika, don't group me up with someone like yourself! I don't want an ugly battleship like that! All the other princesses would laugh at me!”

“B-But, but, wouldn't a round spaceship be better than losing?”

“Don't compare me to a loser like yourself! Besides, the Blue Knight is protecting this ship. I won't lose no matter who I fight!”

“...L-Los,er...? Ahhh~”

Shocked by the weight behind that word, Yurika loses her power and collapsed onto the desk.

“I already know but...”

Yurika herself vaguely understood that she was emitting a loser aura.

But life after admitting that would be cruel and painful.

Her tears overflowed without stopping.

“I'm no Yurika, but I think a round spaceship would suit you too, Tulip”

Leaving Yurika to her crying, Koutarou crossed his arms and nodded.

“Shut it, pleb! Do you want to be thrown out of the airlock!?”

“I think it would take the edge off though...”

“Are you picking a fight with me trying to be clever!?”

“Your highness, please calm down!”

Ruth desperately held Theia back, who looked like she was about to jump onto Koutarou and bite him.

But Koutarou's next words made Theia lose it.

“Besides, it's best not to give children pointy toys. It would be bad if you swallowed it”

“I'll kill you! Sit down right there pleb, I'll beat you to death!”

“Waaah! She's coming!?”

Koutarou had assumed it would be safe since Ruth was restraining her, but unexpectedly, Theia came flying towards him

Theia, who had jumped up on the desk, swooped down on Koutarou like a bird of prey.

“I'll get killed!”

“Your Highness, calm down!”

“Koutarou no, don't come this way! If you're fighting do it over there!”

“At this point it can't be helped, Hissatsu Yurika Shield!”

“Kyaaaa!?”

The sound of an attack hitting could be heard.

“Ah, sorry”

“...Y-You're terrible... ugh...”

“Nijino-san!? Nijino-san, are you okay!?”

“I-I'm not...”

“I won't forget your sacrifice Yurika”

“...Koutarou, you do some awful things from time to time. Well, since it's Yurika it doesn't matter”

“Is that so?”

“Mmm, this dorayaki[4] is delicious. Yurika, would you like a bite?”

“Anything I eat right now would only taste like blood”

The bridge was in chaos.

Because of that, it took a while before they realized the gate was ready for use.

Part 2

The inn Koutarou and the others would be staying in was an old one, established a long time ago.

But ever since the bubble economy, their customers had been stolen by a resort hotel and the inn was gradually stagnating.

Taking advantage of the inn’s situation were the ghost hunters in question.

They promised the inn a large reward in exchange for cooperating with them.

At that day, they were dressed as employees and stood by the entrance instead of the real employees.

And they welcomed Koutarou and the others with oddly happy smiles and fiddling fingers.

“You've come from far away”

“Welcome”

[4] Another Japanese confection, essentially two pancakes wrapped around a red bean paste.

The thin and tall man and the fat and short one were both quite suspicious, but staying at an inn was so unusual for Koutarou and the others that they didn't notice it at all.

“You're the Satomi party, are you not?”

“That's right. We'll be in your care for a while”

Koutarou and Shizuka went up to the receptionist’s desk and greeted them.

“Very good. Now then, would the representative please fill in this hotel register?”

“Okay”

“The remaining guests please follow me. I'll lead you to your room”

“Okaaay”

Once the two of them began working there was nothing unnatural about them.

Shortly afterwards, Koutarou and the others were shown to their room.

“They're falling for it, they're falling for it”

“All according to plan, let's do this Hachi”

“Yes!”

After leading their guests to their room, the two ghost hunters grinned at each other.

Up until now, everything had gone according to plan.

And if everything continued going to plan, they would soon find themselves with a large fortune.

“That 300 million yen will be ours. Let’s do this Hachi!”

“Yeah!”

Their eyes were sparkling with hopes for the future and greed.

Unaware of their plans, Koutarou and the others were puzzled about their room.

“S-Small...”

“Koutarou, are we really staying here?”

“That would be the case but...”

“Would my room be larger than this?”

“Shizuka, it only looks small because of the furniture”

“I've finished measuring Ho-! Its size is no different from room 106 Ho-!”

“No, it's actually smaller”

“Your highness?”

“That's because Yurika is not in her wardrobe”

“Subtracting that amount, this room is five and a half tatami mats large Ho-!”

“I don't want to live in the wardrobe after coming all this way!!”

Koutarou and the others were puzzled by the room’s small size.

When measured it was exactly the same size as the inner room of room 106.

With seven people carrying luggage and two haniwas, it felt extremely small.

And having been in the Blue Knights large bridge, the room felt even smaller.

“Isn't this a bit cheap for the first prize?”

“The second prize LCD TV probably cost more than this”

“The inn has a rustic atmosphere to it~”

“I'm starting to understand why this inn is so close to shutting down”

“If it was going to be like this, I'm not even sure why we came here to begin with”

Everybody's dissatisfaction began showing.

They thought that they'd be able to live in a more spacious room for a while, but instead they were forced into a room that was even smaller than normal. It was only natural for them to feel that way.

“I'm truly sorry everybody. Even though I invited you... If I knew it was this small I would have went with just her highness...”

Ruth felt responsible for what had happened.

She was the one who had won the lottery and invited them.

Her shoulders stooped and she lowered her head with an apologetic expression.

“T-That's not your fault Ruth-san! Even if we hadn't come here, we wouldn't have been able to play by the beach. So we're really happy, right Tulip!?”

“T-That's right Ruth! It's not really that inconvenient, and being close to the beach, this place is great!”

Koutarou and Theia who normally just fought came together to cheer up Ruth.

“...Is that true?”

“O-Of course! Right, Tulip? I can't wait until we can swim!”

“Y-Yeah! I'll teach you how to elegantly swim!”

“Then all is well”

Ruth's expression brightened up.

Seeing that, Koutarou and Theia were about to breathe a sigh of relief when Sanae interrupted them by saying something strange.

“But Koutarou, this room already has a guest”

“What guest?”

Koutarou tilted his head in confusion.

It didn't look like the inn had made a mistake and double booked the room to Koutarou.

But if that was true, they would need to change rooms.

So Koutarou pressed Sanae for more details.

“What do you mean?”

“Hmm, the spiritual energy is too weak for me to tell clearly but I can see traces of a wrung neck, so it's probably the ghost of someone who was murdered or killed themselves”

Sanae furrowed her brows as she started up into the ceiling, sort of like a shortsighted person trying to read something far away.

G-G-Ghost!?”

Yurika immediately reacted to what Sanae said.

Gripped by fear, Yurika threw away her luggage and ran towards the wardrobe.

“Noooooooo! Not ghosts!!”

Yurika threw the futons out of the wardrobe and jumped inside.

And shut the sliding door with all of her might.

“Geez Yurika calm down! Its existence is so weak it can't even make a sound!”

“Noooooo! I hate just knowing there's a ghost here!”

“You're always together with me”

“That's just because I forgot you're a ghost! Noooooooooo!”

Sanae's persuasion failed and Yurika shakes with fear in the wardrobe.

“It's no use. She must be really scared”

As Shizuka tried to slide open the door, Yurika used all of her might to hold against her.

Shizuka was stronger than Yurika so she could force the door open, but if she did, it would break.

“Yurika-sama...”

Ruth's expression began to get darker again. Noticing that, Koutarou hurriedly took her hand.

“Well then, let's go swimming!”

“S-Satomi-sama!?”

“He's right, he's right! That's why we came here to begin with!”

Theia took Ruth's other hand.

“Satomi-sama, your highness, what happened to you all of a sudden?”

“I just felt like seeing you in your swimsuit! I bet you'll look cute!”

“She's not at my level but Ruth is cute!”

Koutarou and Theia tried to forcibly drag Ruth to the beach.

“I'm fine with not seeing Tulip's swimsuit”

“I'll kill you, pleb. Now is not the time but I'll be sure to kill you later! Don't forget!”

“I already did♪”

“Hey!!”

“Y-Your highness? Satomi-sama?”

And as the two of them continued their odd argument, they worked together as they carried a puzzled Ruth away.

“Ah, wait up Koutarou! I'm coming too!”

“E-Everyone wait up! What about Nijino-san!?”

Sanae quickly followed after Koutarou but Shizuka wondered what they should do about Yurika who was still in the wardrobe.

“It's fine. She'll come out once she calms down, she's not a child”

“But...”

“Don't worry. I'll leave Karama and Korama here”

“In that case, I'll leave it to you, Karama-chan, Korama-chan”

“Ho-!”

“Leave it to us Ho-!”

Shizuka changed her mind after Kiriha persuaded her.

Shizuka was also a healthy girl in her teens.

She actually wanted to play on the beach as well.

And with Karama and Korama keeping watch, they wouldn't irresponsibly leave Yurika on her own.

“Well then, Nijino-san we're heading to the—”

“D-D-Don't leave me alone! I don't want to be all alone in a room with a ghost!!”

But once Shizuka made up her mind, Yurika jumped out of the wardrobe.

Still shaking with fear she looked around the room.

“Satomi-san, wait! Satomi-san!”

She grabbed her swimming tools and hurriedly chased after Koutarou and the others.

“Ah... uhm...”

Suddenly finding herself left behind, Shizuka let out a sigh.

Even she couldn't help but feel amazed at Yurika's uselessness.

“...Shizuka, let's go too”

“Yes”

Shizuka smiled at Kiriha who was just as amazed and the followed after the group together.

Part 3

The first thing Koutarou did when he reached the beach was to wipe the sweat off his forehead with a towel.

Having entered the summer season with full force, the sunlight was scorching.

Because of that, the temperature was high and the hot sand burned Koutarou's feet.

“Hot, hot”

During that time, Koutarou was preparing for the beach on his own.

He spread out a sheet and placed a beach parasol while tiptoeing.

Unlike the girls, Koutarou finished changing in an instant.

So, being bored, Koutarou started the preparations.

“Alright, this should be good”

“Oh, if it isn't Satomi-kun!”

Once Koutarou finished setting up, he heard a voice calling for him.

“Eh, where!? Ah, you're right!”

“Hello Koutarou-kun!!”

“What a coincidence, Satomi-kun, you came here to play too!?”

Girls in swimsuits ran towards Koutarou.

There were a total of six of them, they were the cosplay society members.

“Hi everbody. That's right. My friend actually won some tickets to the nearby inn, so we came here to play”

“Really... We really are bound by fate aren't we, Satomi-kun?”

“Ahahaha, that'd be nice”

“I wouldn't mind you as my boyfriend, Koutarou-kun”

“Me too, me too!”

“...Having a cosplayer as my girlfriend sounds like it would cost a lot of money, I'm a bit worried”

“Uh, as expected from Koutarou-kun, you hit where it hurts”

“Satomi-kun lives on his own after all”

“Once I get richer and you still feel that way, then I would love too”

“A boy who keeps you waiting won't get popular you know?”

“I'm aware of that”

Koutarou and the cosplay society members laughed.

“By the way, why is the cosplay society here? Did you all also come here to play?”

After laughing for a while, Koutarou asked what was on his mind.

“Half of it is club activity and the other half is play. Actually, Comiha is just three days from now”

“Now that you mention, you did say something like that last month”

The cosplay society members were making their preparations to cosplay at the event and Koutarou had been called out to give his opinions on their outfits.

That was why Koutarou, who only had baseball on his mind knew about it.

“That's why we’re staying at this hotel that's close to the event area, and enjoying ourselves at the beach”

“I see, that's a good plan”

“Right? Besides, we can meet Sakuraba-san here”

“Sakuraba-senpai you say?”

An unexpected name appeared.

Sakuraba Harumi, she was the president of the knitting society that Koutarou had joined.

Koutarou tilted his head with a confused look on his face as the cosplay society president explained.

“Actually, Sakuraba-san has a villa nearby. When I was chatting with her last month we talked about the summer break. She said she'd be spending it here, so we thought it would be good idea to do the same”

“I see. Thank's for always keeping an eye out for Sakuraba-senpai”

Hearing the explanation, Koutarou gently lowered his head towards the cosplay society members.

“That's nice... I want to be treated so preciously by an underclassman as well”

“Let's put our hopes on Yurika-chan”

“...There's not much hope there”

Ever since Harumi and Yurika had won the sports festival, the cosplay society members had been regurarly interacting with Harumi.

The biggest reason was because she connected Koutarou and Yurika, another reason was because they had noticed Harumi was always alone.

Because of that, they would often strike up conversations with Harumi.

“When I met her earlier, she said she'd show up later”

“Thank you for taking care of both Yurika and Senpai”

“That's fine. Sakuraba-san is cute, hopefully we can get her to join the cosclub♪”

“Ahahaha”

“The cosclub and knitting society are both small right? One needs to effectively use chances they've been given”

“So when that time comes does that mean you'll join us?”

Koutarou and the others began laughing once more.

“By the way president, should we move over here too? If we're playing, the more the better”

“That's true. Good idea, vice president”

“You're too kind”

After nodding to the vice president, the president turned towards Koutarou again.

“Satomi-kun, since it's like that, we'll be taking our leave for a while. We need to go get our luggage”

“Okay, I'll be waiting”

“Alright everyone, let's go!”

“Okaaay”

And the cosplay society members left just as energetically as they had arrived.

A few minutes after Koutarou and the cosplay society parted, everyone from room 106 had finished changing and arrived at the beach.

“Wow... what's with these girls...”

“Are they models or something?”

“Maybe it's some kind of event or photo shoot”

“Woah, that girl’s breasts are huge”

“That short girl is also pretty big...”

Once the girls appeared, every man on the beach stared at them.

Along with the men, many of the women glared at them.

“Hey Koutarou, sorry for the wait!”

“Satomi-kun, you've already finished preparations? Thank you~”

“Mhm, well done for a plebeian”

“S-Sorry for keeping you waiting, S-Satomi-sama”

“Calm down will you, Ruth?”

“Satomi-san, you wouldn't happen to know where my underwear is would you!?”

When it came to looks they were all beautiful, so naturally everyone on the beach stared at them.

But apart from Ruth, nobody paid any mind to that.

They weren't the type to bother with that.

Ruth was the only one who worried about the glances she was getting as she nervously walked across the beach.

“How about it Koutarou!? Did you fall for Sanae-chan's unbelievable cuteness!?”

“Either way, Kurano-san, you're breasts are so large... they look like they're about to burst out of the swimsuit... I'm so envious...”

“Shizuka, having large breasts is not that good of a thing. There aren't a lot of outfits that are appropriate for this figure and I get a lot of unwanted attention”

“Now that you mention it, everyone's looking this way~”

“That's because they're attracted to our grace. Quite excellent”

“S-Satomi-sama, help me! A-All the people are looking this way!!”

As Ruth tried to run away from everyone's stares, the remaining five girls approached Koutarou while showing off their swim suits.

Apart from Ruth, the five of them had various reasons for expecting Koutarou to be surprised.

“How about it? Aren't you happy, Satomi-kun? You're the target of envy for everyone on the beach, and you have six cute girls all for yourself! — Huh?”

However, their plan splendidly collapsed.

While all of the men were staring at them, only Koutarou was looking elsewhere.

“I see, if you have such a large villa, you must be quite the upper class lady, senpai”

“S-Satomi-kun, a lady... that's...”

“If you have a villa larger than the house I used to live in, you'd normally called a lady. Besides your clothes fit the bill”

“T-This is... b-because...!”

Koutarou was looking at Sakuraba Harumi who was wearing a summer dress and carrying a parasol.

She was dressed in something you'd normally expect a upper class lady to wear and despite this heat she he had a cool atmosphere around here.

“You look great, very lady like. Nahahahaha”

“...Satomi-kun, you tease...”

Despite the cool atmosphere, her cheeks were heating up.

“C-Curse you, Koutarou... You're completely ignoring us!?”

“Sakuraba-senpai!? Why are you here!?”

“Not you again, Sakuraba Harumi!”

“If I recall ,that girl is Satomi-kun's society—”

“Sakuraba Harumi. She's in class 2-A and the president of the knitting society. Aside from his childhood friend Matsudaira Kenji, she is the closest person to Koutarou”

Because of this unexpected development, the five girls were extremely unhappy at Koutarou.

In this situation it was completely unjust resentment, but the five girls didn't care.

“Satomi-sama, please don't look away and save me!”

But even now Ruth was still trying to escape the glances cast on her.

“Stupid Koutarou!! You blockhead! Give us back the time we spent worrying!!”

“Uwah!? W-What!?”

“Satomi-kun!?”

Sanae thrust herself at Koutarou and knocked him down onto the sand.

And before Koutarou could feel the scorching hot sand burning him, Sanae and Theia attacked.

“Bury him! This disloyal might as well drown in the tide!!”

“I won't tell you to get excited anymore, just look this way! At least give us the standard response! Smile and say something like 'your new swimsuit is really cute'!!”

“Ahhh! W-Whaaat!?”

Taken by surprise, Theia pinned Koutarou down.

Meanwhile, Sanae began piling sand onto Koutarou.

“A-As if Tulip alone could hold me down!!”

“Ah, Ah, Wah!”

Since Theia was small, Koutarou began to forcibly stand up while she was still holding onto him.

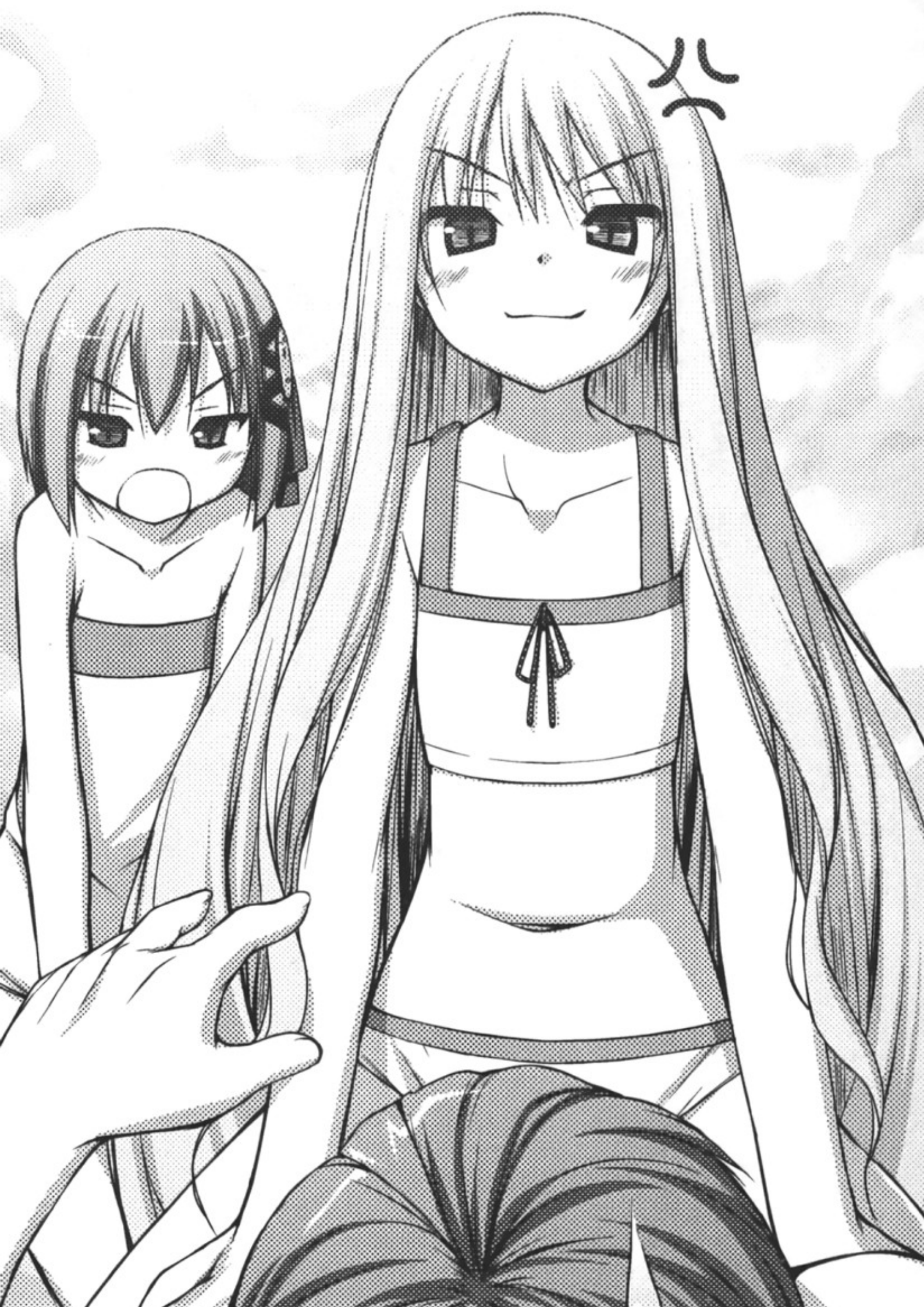
“I won't let you, Satomi-kun!”

“Landlord-san!?”

“Sanae-chan, I'll help you out!”

“Yurika, you go dig the hole! You're good at digging grave pits right!?”

“Fueeeeh, I really don't want too!”



“I will help too. Karama, Korama, begin digging”

“Understood Ho-!”

“Leave it to us Ho-! Digging is our specialty!”

But because of more girls joining in, Koutarou found himself at a disadvantage.

“You'll learn what happens when you hurt a maiden’s pride!”

“Ouch, Owowowow, L-Landlord-san, don't look so happy while you're pulling off a joint lock!”

While humming, Shizuka grabbed Koutarou's legs and held him in place using several joint locks.

“Well done Shizuka! You have my praise!”

“Maybe I'll get a bit more into it, Ey♪”

Shizuka wasn't actually that angry at Koutarou, but she had joined in since it looked like fun.

Since they came here to play, she wanted to enjoy herself to her fullest before going home.

“Owowowow, too much! Too much!”

Koutarou desperately struggled as he tried to escape but he didn't stand a chance against Shizuka.

And while Theia and Shizuka held down Koutarou, the other girls had dug a large hole.

“S-Satomi-kun is being buried... w-what should I do...”

“Excuse me, your highness, it might be best not to get too rough...”

Harumi and Ruth tried to stop them.

But Harumi was still in shock due to the sudden event.

So in reality, Ruth was the only one trying to stop them.

“Ruth-san!? Save me, Ruth-san!!”

Right now, she was Koutarou's only hope.

He desperately called for her help.

“Satomi-sama, just hold on a while longer! I'll be right—”

“Ruth! What did you come here for!?”

But as Theia scolded her froze and stopped moving.

It was only at times like these that Theia was bullish.

Theia seized the initiative against Ruth who had an indecisive attitude.

“W-Well...”

“Remember what you're wearing! What did you feel when you chose that!? And what did you feel when you put it on today!? And with that in mind you'll still forgive this stupid vassal!?”

“...What I'm wearing—”

Ruth stopped mid-sentence after taking in what Theia had said.

And she looked at Theia and her own swimsuits.

Although they weren't very expensive, they were cute swimsuits that fit them well.

They were the swimsuits Koutarou had bought for them.

“He didn't need to praise me! I'm fine with him just taking a peek! But no, what did this stupid vassal do!?”

The emotions Ruth had felt when she had bought the swimsuit, and the days she had spent waiting for the day of the trip came rushing back.

And most of all, the emotion Ruth had felt when she changed into the swimsuit reappeared.

“I won't forgive him! At this rate my pride as a woman won't forgive him! What about you Ruth!?”

“I...”

And the last thing she remembered was Koutarou not looking at her or Theia.

He had been talking to another woman without even taking a peek at them.

Since Koutarou had bought them, he could have at least showed some interest.

I...!!

And suddenly, something inside of Ruth snapped.

“...Let's bury him, your highness, thoroughly. No, just burying him would be too lax. To make sure he never crawls out, lets bind his arms and legs!”

Ruth was looking at Koutarou with a fire in her eyes.

It was almost as if Theia's anger had possessed her.

“Well said Ruth! I'll leave it to you!”

“As you wish, my princess!”

And Ruth cheerfully joined in to bury Koutarou.

She quickly bound his limbs with a rope and deprived him off his freedom.

She showed no hesitation or mercy.

“Waaaa, even Ruth-san!? Did I do something to offend you Ruth-san!?”

“Sometimes not doing anything is a crime in itself! There's a limit to how nice you can be!”

“W-Whyyyy!?”

Koutarou desperately tried to break free, but against the united force of the six girls he stood no chance.

And thus, Koutarou soon found himself buried on the beach.

Part 4

The waves that came all the way up to Koutarou's face slowly pulled back towards the sea.

Because of the high tide, the waves gradually closed in on Koutarou.

With his body under the sand, the only thing Koutarou could move was his head.

Unable to move, Koutarou could only pull his head away from the approaching waves.

“...Why did it come to this?”

Koutarou couldn't think of a reason for why he had been buried.

To Koutarou, after he had finished preparations he had gone to talk to Harumi like always.

“Or did I do something before that...?”

Koutarou was at a loss.

Unused to women, Koutarou couldn't understand their feelings.

Even though they weren't in love, they wanted the people close to them to at least show some interest.

“...I don't get it...”

And as Koutarou was tilting his head, a shadow covered him.

“Satomi-kun”

“Sakuraba-senpai!”

The shadow covering him was thanks to Harumi's parasol.

She had approached Koutarou without him noticing and protected him from the sunlight.

“Good timing senpai! Please help me!”

“...Hmm... what should I do?”

Harumi squatted next to Koutarou and smiled.

“Don't tease me and please help me instead”

“But if I let you out, you'll run off somewhere... If you'd talk with me for a while longer I wouldn't mind freeing you”

“Senpai, you're a bigger tease than normal”

“Fufu, it might be because we're at a seaside resort, I'm in high spirits”

“Well, that's obvious”

Though it might have been because of the midday sun, Harumi's smile looked brighter than ever.

Her friendship with Yurika might have been a good thing after all...

Koutarou felt like Harumi's current behavior was a positive thing.

But there were those that felt like Koutarou and Harumi chatting was a negative thing.

“C-Curse you Sakuraba Harumi, just how much of a heroine are you!

“And what is Koutarou thinking!? Falling for that woman's obvious tricks!

“Your highness, what should we do?”

“Just burying was too naive! The plebeian needs a harsher punishment!”

Theia, Ruth and Sanae were clearly enraged.

“Then what do we do?”

And Shizuka was enjoying herself.

She was feeling a sense of freedom after coming to the beach.

“...Let's play watermelon splitting[5]!”

Although Kiriha had suggested it, it wasn't clear if she was kidding or if she was serious.

She acted like she always did and showed the large watermelon she was carrying.

“Ah, that sounds like fun!”

“I wonder what will split first, the melon or Koutarou's head”

Kiriha smiled as she said that and pulled out a wooden sword.

“Let's do it!”

“I don't know what we're doing but let's do it”

“No, let's stop, I feel sorry for Sakuraba-senpai~”

[5] A game where you attempt to split a watermelon while blindfolded with other people guiding you

Yurika tried to stop the girls.

After Koutarou had been buried, Yurika noticed Harumi and had kept quiet so she wouldn't get in their way.

“Nobody asked for your opinion!”

“Hiiiih! Run away! Sakuraba-senpai, run away!”

But in the end, it was Yurika.

She lost to Theia's power and withdrew.

Not taking a stand was just like our magical girl, Rainbow Yurika.

Meanwhile, Koutarou and Harumi were completely unaware of the conspiracy forming as they happily chatted.

“Satomi-kun, you're covered in sweat. It really must be hot in the sand right?”

“Ah, it's fine. I'll just dirty your handkerchief”

Harumi pulled out a handkerchief out of her pocket and gently wiped the sweat from Koutarou's forehead.

“There we go, you're all clean now”

“Senpai...”

“Fufufu, it's almost like I've become your mom, Satomi-kun”

Koutarou was bothered by the fact that the good smelling handkerchief was ruined by his sweat, but Harumi didn't mind at all.

“Sakuraba-senpai~, let's play watermelon splitting together♪”

Theia, who was holding a large watermelon, approached them.

Because of her small body, the melon covered up half of it.

Surprised by someone suddenly calling out to her, Harumi was at a loss for words.

She was normally bad with strangers, and she had dropped her guard around Koutarou.

Because of that, she was more startled than normal.

“Sakuraba-senpai! Let's make some wonderful summer memories together♪"

“S-Sure”

Harumi instinctively nodded.

“Who's there? Is it Tulip?”

Unable to turn his body, Koutarou couldn't turn around to look at Theia.

He had no choice but to guess based on the voice, and because Theia wasn't speaking like she normally did he wasn't sure.

“...That's right, it's me pleb”

As Theia spoke to him, she put down the watermelon next to his head.

At that time, Koutarou got a good feel for the size and weight of the melon based on the vibrations.

The watermelon was at least three times the size of Koutarou's head.

And Theia's face peeked out from behind the it.

Theia brought her mouth next to Koutarou's ear and whispered.

“Kukuku, I'll have you make some memories with us too”

“What are you trying to do, Tulip!?”

“Oh it's nothing, just some watermelon splitting. We're just splitting it with a chop, kukukukuku”

Making sure Harumi isn't looking, Theia laughed as she talked to Koutarou.

She smiled even darker than ever before.

As Koutarou got involved with the small conspiracy, a little way off from them, another conspiracy began.

“Aniki, it seems like they're playing watermelon splitting”

“Good, right now all of their attention will be focused on the watermelon. Now's a chance to capture the target”

“Are we doing it?”

“Of course we are. If we don't we'll become homeless”

“We did use all of our remaining money after all”

The ringleaders of that conspiracy were none other than the ghost hunters.

They were observing Koutarou and the others through their binoculars on some rocks.

“If we manage to sell off that ghost we'll be rich”

“We'll be able to buy a TV and bike”

“That's right. Follow me, Hachi”

“What are we doing?”

“It'll be a detour but we'll approach them from the sea. That way they won't notice us, and even if they did we can just hide our equipment under the water and they won't suspect a thing”

“As expected from Aniki! Even though ghost hunters do righteous things, you always make it seem like we're doing something bad!”

“Shut it Hachi! I'm still a hero of justice! I'm not not in the wrong, it's all poverty’s fault!”

The two carried their suspicious tools and machines and jumped into the sea.

Their goal was to capture Sanae.

Part 5

“Ey!”

Swinging down the wooden sword with all of her might, Harumi had missed three times up until now.

Up until now she had hit something hard all three times and bounced off.

But now she hit something soft and the tip of the sword felt like it sank in.

And she couldn't hear Koutarou's screams anymore.

“You did it, Sakuraba-senpai!”

Instead, Yurika shouted out.

Hearing that, Harumi quickly took of her blindfold.

“Satomi-kun, Satomi-kun! Are you okay!?”

Harumi had hit Koutarou's head three times.

Koutarou said not to mind, but even then there was no way Harumi wouldn't worry.

Which was why when Harumi took off her blindfold, she began looking for Koutarou.

“Ah, this is delicious”

But Koutarou was right in front of her and eating the watermelon now split in half.

Koutarou was so absorbed in eating the watermelon that he didn't notice Harumi worrying about him.

“T-Thank god...”

Theia or Sanae would probably have been angry, but this was Harumi.

Seeing Koutarou energetically eating the watermelon, she let out a sigh of relief and sat down on the spot..

“Do you wa ...chomp.. to eat ...chomp... too, senpai?

“O-Once I've settled down I'll have some”

“Tsk, she already succeeded...”

“Nyahaha, Harumi was too weak to split Koutarou's head in two”

Displeased, Theia and Sanae showed up.

Having finished eating part of the watermelon Koutarou complained to the two.

“It's over, so let me out of here already”

But the two of them shook their heads.

“I refuse”

“Next up is Shizuka's turn”

“W-What!?”

Koutarou glared at the two of them.

If Shizuka, who was well known for her combat abilities, were to grab the wooden sword, Koutarou wasn't sure what would happen to his head.

“Cheestooo!!”

Besides, Shizuka was all fired up, she repeatedly swung the wooden sword towards the sea.

Her pressure and speed were abnormal; anyone could tell Koutarou was in danger.

“S-Satomi-kun, I'll save you right now!!”

Even Harumi could tell and she began digging to save Koutarou.

But someone got in the way.

“Sakuraba-senpai, this way please~ You'll get in the way for the next watermelon splitting”

“Kya!? But Satomi-kun is still...!!”

“It's fine, Sakuraba-senpai. Please just leave Satomi-san to us”

“Even you, Nijino-san!?”

Theia and Yurika dragged Harumi away.

Theia aside, Yurika cooperating wasn't just because she was scared of Theia but because she also wanted to let Harumi get away.

Instead, Kiriha came in and recovered the split watermelon, and Ruth placed a new one.

“This is bad, I need to do something!”

Panicking, Koutarou tried to get out from the sand.

Thankfully, because Harumi had been digging, he managed to get his arm above the sand.

“Alright!”

“Too bad!”

“Please just wait there, Satomi-sama”

“Waaaaaah!”

But Sanae and Ruth buried him again.

“Stop it already, Sanae!”

“No way♪”

“And why are you so angry, Ruth-san!?”

“Are you telling me to spell it out for you!? Don't make me laugh! That sort of betrayal is punishable by death!”

“Just give up Koutarou”

“What do you mean by betrayal!?”

As Sanae and Ruth reburied Koutarou, Theia and Yurika dragged Harumi away, Shizuka happily swung her wooden sword and Kiriha smiled before biting into the watermelon.

Everybody was so focused on what they were doing that they forgot about their surroundings.

You could say they were enjoying themselves to their fullest at the beach.

“Now Hachi!”

“Alright!”

And that was when the ghost hunters put their plan into action.

Rising up from the sea, they approached Koutarou and the rest.

They had a big insect net in each hand.

They were tools used for capturing ghosts, they were excellent for capturing ghosts in the same way you could capture insects.

They readied themselves and dashed towards Sanae.

“Hmm?”

Koutarou who was being buried into the sand again was the first to notice them.

But Koutarou couldn't imagine that they were planning on capturing Sanae with their insect nets, so at first he just stared at them thinking there are some strange people out there.

“Just wait, we'll catch you right now, our cute little kitten!”

“Money! We'll make a video and rake in the cash! Money! We'll sell her off and rake in even more!”

But as they got closer and Koutarou heard the strange things they were saying, he started getting worried.

And as their excitement increased, so did Koutarou's worries.

“Hey everyone, someone's coming from behind, calm down a little”

Nobody except Koutarou had noticed them.

So Koutarou attempted to alert them, but the only one who believed him was Harumi.

Hearing Koutarou's words, she turned her head around.

“Ah...”

And she saw a suspicious looking pair.

As she saw them, Harumi stiffened up.

They looked like perverts, the kind of people Harumi was terrible at dealing with.

“I won't fall for that trick♪”

“You're too simple pleb! If you're going to lie at least make up something better!”

“We should punish him”

But Sanae, Theia and Ruth, who were next to Harumi, assumed Koutarou was just trying to escape and didn't believe him at all.

Among them, Yurika was the only one to quickly turn around after noticing Harumi's expression changing.

“I wonder who they could be...”

But the simple minded Yurika didn't think the approaching ghost hunters were any danger.

“Watch out, Koutarou!”

“Everyone! Someone's coming your way!”

A little bit away, Kiriha and Shizuka had noticed the ghost hunters closing in on Koutarou and the others.

But since they were completely caught off guard, the best they could do was shout out to the others.

“What?”

“Someone as in who?”

“Did something happen?”

And Theia, Sanae and Ruth finally turned around.

“I've got youuuuu!”

“Come on, my angels!!”

But at that moment the ghost hunters swung down their insect nets with all of their might.

“Kyaaaaaa!?”

However in order to escape the net coming in from above, Sanae quickly hid under the sand.

Fighting with Koutarou on a daily basis, Sanae was accustomed to surprise attacks.

“Kya!?”

“W-What is this!?”

Since Sanae avoided the net, Harumi and Ruth were hit instead.

Unable to dodge, the nets covered their heads.

“We did it Hachi! Catching one girl is nothing to me!”

“I caught her too! Now we can do whatever we want!”

The ghost hunters were rejoicing.

The only thing in their minds now was the luxurious life they would be living after they had sold off Sanae.

They would get so much alcohol they could swim in it, and get a new TV and bike.

The future they had ahead of them was bright...or so they thought.

“Hey Hachi, what do you mean you too?”

“Aniki, I'm the one who caught her”

At that point they both realized they had caught one ghost(?) each.

But they had only targeted a lone ghost.

“Hmm? What does this mean?”

“Aniki, this ghost looks like a human to me”

“Same here. Hey Hachi, we missed the target!”

“Damnit! We caught the wrong ones!”

By the time the two realized their mistake it was already too late, Sanae was long gone.

“N-Noooo! Please save me, Satomi-kuuun!”

“P-Perverts!!”

And even worse, the girls they had caught began screaming.

The suspicious group that had come from the sea had caught two girls sitting on the sand with nets.

Their eyes were bloodshot, their breathing was rough and water was dripping off their bodies.

They were the very definition of perverts.

“What the hell are you doing!?”

Hearing Ruth and Harumi screaming, Koutarou forcibly jumped out from the sand.

Koutarou's limbs had been bound with ropes by Ruth, but after forcing his way out of the sand, the ropes had been cut.

It was the superhuman strength that occured in life and death situations.

“Senpai and Ruth are crying!”

Breaking free from the sand, Koutarou glared at the ghost hunters with eyes filled with rage.

The ghost hunters let go of the insect nets and began making excuses.

“W-Wait up young man! We're not after these girls!”

“T-That's right! We're after a different one, that small one from before!

“He's right, young man! We're only trying to capture that small girl from before so we can sell her off!”

“Please believe us! We have no interest in normal girls!”

But their excuses only fueled Koutarou's anger.

“S-So you're not just perverts, but your targeting small girls like Theia!?”

Koutarou didn't think the two of them were talking about Sanae.

That was because he didn't think they could see her.

And it wasn't just Koutarou, everyone on the beach thought the same thing.

“So they're targetting m-me!? As I thought, even blending in with the common rabble my noble aura still makes me stand out!”

So as a result nobody thought this was about anyone but Theia.

That these two are planning on kidnapping young girls and do terrible things to them, unforgivable perverts.

“Damnit you perverts! I don't give a damn who you're targeting! We have our hands filled with Yurika as the only pervert as it is!!”

“S-Satomi-san, at least call it cosplaying! A pervert is just too cruel!”

As Koutarou blurts out his true feelings, tears began streaming down on Yurika's face.

“...I see... so in Satomi-san's eyes I'm just a pervert...”

Taking a critical hit from an unexpected place, Yurika collapsed and kept crying.

“I'm starting to hate everything... Maybe I should visit home for once...

“Calm down young man! We only need that girl for the safety of society and to make a living!”

“He's right, we have no ulterior motives!”

“You make a living on it!? You're hardened criminals! On top of that you dare make Sakuraba-senpai and Ruth-san cry!? I'll kick you back into the sea and turn you into fish food!”

Enraged, Koutarou closed the distance from the ghost hunters.

At the same time, the ghost hunters started backing off.

But shortly they were unable to back up any further.

“Where do you two think you're going!?”

“Eh? From behind as well!?”

Shizuka stood behind them with the wooden sword in her hand.

Her forehead was wrinkled, her veins were showing and her eyes were filled with hatred.

“Not good! We're making a break for it Hachi!”

“W-We can't aniki! We're completely surrounded!”

Apart from Yurika, Harumi and Ruth, the remaining members had surrounded the ghost hunters.

Koutarou clenched his fists, Shizuka tightened her grip on the wooden sword, Theia summoned a beam cannon from Blue Knight and Kiriha ordered her two haniwas to attack.

And Sanae appeared from under the sand, made the split watermelons float and took aim.

“What's wrong Satomi-kun, what happened!?”

More of Koutarou's allies appeared.

They were the six members of the cosplay society.

Planning to group up with Koutarou and the rest, they came carrying their luggage.

“Actually, some perverts appeared! It's dangerous so keep your distance!”

“Perverts!?”

“That type do appear from time to time”

“Unforgivable!”

“Enemies of women!”

Hearing the situation, the girls helped surround the ghost hunters.

They were holding onto filled pet bottles and metal flasks.

If it came down to it, they were planning on throwing them.

“There's perverts”

“Seriously?”

“Well those girls are cute...”

“I seriously can't believe it...”

On top of that, the other people on the beach began glaring at the ghost hunters, and they began encircling them to keep them from getting away.

It was no longer possible for them to retreat.

“I-It's no use...”

“It's all over”

The two of them gave up on trying to persuade and resist.

And just like Yurika they began crying.

“By the way, we were playing watermelon splitting but, would you like to join in?”

At that point, Shizuka's refreshing smile left the two ghost hunters with some unforgettable summer memories.

Rare Cards and Beetles

Part 1

Monday, August 11th

After enjoying the watermelon to their fullest, Koutarou, the invaders, Harumi, Shizuka and the cosplay society members played until sunset.

By the time they got back to the inn, they were exhausted.

Because of that, Koutarou and the others were on their way to the hot springs to heal up.

“Ahhhh~ I feel alive again~”

As Koutarou dipped into the outdoor hot springs, he felt as if his exhaustion simply melted.

On top of that, his tanned skin stung a little as he entered the water.

However it wasn't a sharp pain, instead it was one of the factors in his healing.

“The room is small, but this hot spring is so large...”

The hot springs here were separated for men and women.

So Koutarou had dipped into a different hot springs than the girls and because there were no other guests it was almost as if he was in a large bathtub.

Because Koutarou's surroundings were always noisy, this large and quiet hot springs was just what he needed.

“Today was fun... The perverts aside, we played for a long time...”

Koutarou recalled the events for today.

After chasing off the perverts(?), Koutarou and the others, a total of 14 people, played together.

Not just swimming, they played beach volleyball and had a barbecue.

“And senpai got along with everyone, good good”

Though Harumi didn't swim because of her weak constitution, she, Yurika, Ruth and the cosplay society members, in other words the people who weren't good with sports were playing on the beach.

And she also joined Koutarou for a little while to play beach volleyball.

Having fun really is the most important part...

Harumi, who was mostly on her own, was next to a lot of other people.

And that was the thing Koutarou was the happiest about.

Because of that, even after Harumi had returned to her villa, Koutarou was still in a good mood.

“...!”

“...!?”

The girls from room 106 could be heard from the women's bath.

Though it was through a wall and he couldn't clearly hear them, they were all together discussing something.

“Fufufu, are they at it again?”

Normally Koutarou would get angry and shout at them to not cause trouble for the other customers, but not this time.

He could hear the girls talking in calm voices.

They had all played a lot during the day and were all exhausted.

“You guys, don't get too carried away...”

And as Koutarou was soaking in the water, he dozed off.

After Koutarou had fallen asleep in the men's bath, a special topic could be heard being discussed in the women's bath.

In the women's bath, the girls from room 106 were the only ones there, on top of that, Koutarou who was always with them was in the men's bath next to them.

Because of that, the topics naturally drifted towards something they normally wouldn't talk about.

Their first topic was complaints about Koutarou.

Normally he was straight on, not holding back, but from time to time he would do something incredibly stupid.

Dissatisfied by that, all of them were recounting previous experiences. “...That's why to tell you the truth, I'm not that attached to the throne. As long as I can protect my mother, I don't need to become emperor”

The next topic branched off from that.

Due to Koutarou's unexpected resistance, the girls’ invasions weren't going as planned.

It had already been four months since they came to room 106, so everyone was starting to panic.

But nobody was giving up, and that was because they all had reasons to not back down.

So the conversation naturally drifted towards that topic.

“However, to protect my mother, who is the current emperor, being just a princess is not enough. I need to show that I am worthy of being emperor, or the citizens will not approve of my actions. From there, I would just get absorbed into a highly structured military organization”

“So you don't want room 106 to become emperor, but because you want to protect your mom?”

Oddly enough, Sanae had listened to Theia without making fun of her and was looking at her with a serious expression.

“That's right. So I definitely won't back down”

“Hmm, so you're kind of like me”

“Like you?”

And Theia was just as serious.

She didn't feel like making fun of her own intentions.

And as her small body was soaking in the water, she pointed her ears towards Sanae.

“Yes, like me. I need to wait for papa and mama in room 106”

Sanae sat down on the edge of the hot springs and began talking while lightly kicking her feet.

However since she was a ghost she couldn't stir up the water, her legs moved almost as if there was no water there.

“My papa and mama would be troubled if I wasn't there when they got back right? That's why I definitely won't lose either. That place is my home after all”

“I see, so you're also doing it for your parent’s sake... In that case you can't back down”

Theia showed a gentle expression.

Her normal aggression was nowhere to be seen.

The fact that she was exhausted might have helped as well.

Thanks to that Sanae forgot the antipathy she had begun feeling.

“I-In that case I can't back down either!”

“You?”

“You're just lying~”

Theia was amazed and Sanae quickly denied it.

“I'm not lying! I have a proper reason too!”

Yurika would normally back down but because of the serious atmosphere, her bullish attitude didn't change.

Slightly excited, she firmly grasped the towel she was playing with.

“I'm kind of interested, tell me more, Yurika”

Next to her, Kiriha smiled.

Having entered the hot springs, her breasts were free from gravity and looked even bigger than normal.

And while Kiriha were hiding them behind a towel, she had showed a gentle smile.

“Y-Yes”

Unexpectedly receiving support, Yurika was a bit confused.

However she quickly pulled herself together and began explaining her situation.

“Actually, I'm a magical girl as a replacement for the person who I owe my life to”

“Owe your life...”

Shizuka, who was in front of Yurika made, a perplexed expression.

She was currently undoing her hair, so at first glance she could be mistaken for a different person.

And her long hair shook as she tilted her head.

Shizuka had vague doubts about what it meant to owe your life to a cosplayer.

“Yes. When I was in danger that person saved me. But in return that person suffered a large injury...”

Yurika looks down with a sad expression.

She felt responsibility for that person’s injury.

“So that's why you became a magical girl instead of that person?”

“That's right”

Yurika nodded.

“That's why I'll defend the peace in the world. I miss not being able to see my family but this is something I have to do”

“What do you mean not being able to see your family?”

“If a magical girl stays at home, they'll only cause trouble for their families. That's why I left before they got in any danger. My predecessor also fought alone”

“Oh.... That's an inspiring determination...”

Before causing trouble at home as a cosplayer she's trying to become independent... And she started cosplaying to repay the kindness that was shown to her. I thought she was completely useless, but it seems she at least has some guts....

Even Sanae who would always throw negative comments at Yurika began showing her slightly more respect.

“I see. A reason befitting of you”

Theia felt about the same, but she obediently accepted Yurika's words.

And after lightly nodding towards Yurika, Theia turned her attention to Kiriha.

“So for what reason did you come to the surface, Kiriha”

“I believe I've told you before. I'm here to reclaim what was stolen. That is all”

Theia was not satisfied with Kiriha's answer.

“After spending several hundred years underground, there has to be a reason for suddenly planning to invade the surface, right? Why now?

“That's harsh...”

Kiriha smiled wryly and she gave up on trying to hide her reasons after Theia stared at her.

“...As the surface dwellers advance, we, the People of the Earth have begun drastically dropping in population”

“Your population?”

“With the admiration towards the modernized surface, our population is emigrating and at the same time, the resources underground began to dry up. When calculating the decline in population and the resources drying up, it will become infeasible to live underground in a few generations”

In the past, Kiriha's clan held a vastly superior scientific technology over the surface dwellers.

And pretty much everyone held pride in that, so almost no one left to go to the surface.

But with the surface becoming modernized in a large scale, the underground began losing its appeal.

The cultural aspect, starting with art and music that had begun to greatly develop was the biggest reason.

More and more headed towards the surface and didn't return.

And as the resources began depleting, the emigration only accelerated.

“However, we can't just wait on our extinction. And that's why I decided to come up to the surface. The only choice we have is coming to the surface, making a base and prospering again”

“But the surface governments won't allow it”

“That's right. Having been forced underground by the surface dwellers, it sounds like nothing but selfish excuses to us”

“I don't really get it but if you don't invade, everyone will lose their homes?”

“Fufufu, bluntly put, that's correct”

In contrast to the seriousness of the situation, Kiriha smiled.

“But, Kiriha-san, you seem to be enjoying yourself”

“Even though my clan will go extinct at this rate, it's not something just my generation can do something about. We can't back down no matter what, but on the other side we can't force our way and cause an irreparable situation. Because of our small numbers we only have one chance”

“I see. So a slow, careful and certain invasion over a long period of time is required. I assume you're currently laying the foundation for that, correct?”

“Spot on, Theia-dono”

Kiriha's clan was a minority; their biggest fear was being branded as terrorists by the surface dwellers.

If that were to happen, they would meet the same fate several other minorities around the world had.

So in a few generations, if they didn't succeed at making a base on the surface, they would meet their end.

So to Kiriha who was leading the invasion, the most important thing was a plain, safe and certain invasion.

If they relied on force they would not be able to avoid extinction.

In a way, it was a situation very similar to Theia's.

If the invasion wasn't supported by the citizens they would unable to survive.

“That said, it is true that I have been enjoying myself since I came to the surface”

“Is there something you want to do?”

Kiriha nodded to Shizuka's question.

“I've been wanting to ride on a roller coaster”

“A roller coaster!?”

Everyone was caught off guard.

“Actually, I once came up to the surface as a child but back then I was unable to ride one, because I was too short”

Kiriha felt nostalgic.

“So that's why you want to ride one? Surprisingly good taste for an underground person”

“If you told my father he would scold me though”

As Kiriha said that her shoulders dropped.

The urge to go to the surface was one of the reasons for Kiriha's clans decline.

Which was why, the idea that the patriarch's daughter wanted to ride a roller coaster was ridiculous.

“Looking at it from a distance, it seems all the invaders of room 106 has family problems”

Having kept quiet up until now, Ruth came to that conclusion and Shizuka quickly agreed.

“Now that you mention it... Besides, I want to value Corona house that my parents left me, and Satomi-kun is living in room 106 because he didn't want to cause any problems for his father. So we're just like everyone else”

As a mysterious coincidence, everyone had been born in that kind of family, and that was why they could understand one another.

That they or the others would never back down.

Their fight over room 106 would still continue on.

“It sure is problematic”

“There's no problem. I'll win after all”

“I-I won't lose either!”

“I don't understand why Yurika hasn't lost yet. No matter how I look at it she's just not capable but...”

“That's a horrible thing to say~!”

“L-Look Nijino-san, they say luck is a skill of its own”

“Don't put it in a way that sounds like it's all because of luck!”

Part 2

Cheerful voices could be heard from the women's bath.

They were all enemies, and they would still fight but oddly enough they were all smiling.

That was probably because they knew somewhere deep inside that they were both enemies and friends.

“...Let's go Hachi”

“Got it Aniki”

And it was at that moment that the ghost hunter attempted their second plan.

“Hm....? E-Eh? What?”

Koutarou woke up from his sleeping after hearing the commotion from the women's bath.

“Noooooooooooo, P-Perverts!! Peepers!!”

“You bastards! You boldly came here to sully my noble body!?”

“T-They tried to touch them!! Those people tried to touch my breasts!!”

“Karama, Korama, protect Ruth! Ruth, this way!”

“Would you guys give it a break!? Are you stalkers!?”

“Ahhh I've had it!! Just as we were happily chatting away!”

He could hear the six girl’s voices.

And for some reason they were enraged.

“What's going on over there?”

Having just woken up, Koutarou had no idea what was going on.

“I-It's just a misunderstanding! We're not into peeping! We have no interest in your normal bodies!”

“That's right! We only want to lock in that small girl and sip on some sweet juices!”

The familiar voices of some men could be heard.

However, still foggy, Koutarou couldn't connect their voices to their owners.

“Arghhh!! S-Shizuka, c-can I blow these guys away!? I can't forgive them for saying something like that to me!!”

“That's fine! This time's special! Setting these no-good criminals free the first time was a mistake!”

“Blue Knight!! Bring out the high density beam cannon!!”

“Karama, Korama, set up an energy amplification field!!”

“Understood Ho-! Let's go Korama!”

“Now's the time for our ultimate formation Ho-!”

“Waaaaaaah, It's already over!!”

“Aniki! Anikiii!!”

“Die perverts~!!”

Flashes could be seen from the women's bath.

“Woah!?”

Right afterwards, two charred men came flying out of the women's bath and landed in front of Koutarou.

“You guys are those guys from the beach...”

As he wiped away some splashed water from his face, Koutarou finally remembered the men in front of him.

They were the perverts trying to capture Theia at the beach.

“...You guys... despite getting beaten up that badly during the day... you have guts, I'll give you that...”

Their objectives aside, Koutarou found himself unable to not admire their determination.

“Y-Young man, what is up with t-those girls you’re with...?

“I'm having trouble with them myself”

“I-Is that so...”

But that was the end of their guts.

Having been beaten to a pulp by the girls, they were unable to do anything else.

“Glub glub glub”

“Please pass on...”

Koutarou watched on as the two men sank to the bottom of the hot spring.

Part 3

“Geez, it's gotten really late”

Koutarou left the men's bath a while after the girl's had left the women's bath.

Since he was the only one in the men's bath, it took a lot of time pulling the ghost hunters up from the hot springs.

“I'm back”

Because of that the girls should have gotten back to the room before he did.

But even after opening the door to the room, no sounds could be heard, the room was oddly quiet.

“...That's strange, they should have gotten back by now”

Koutarou tilted his head, took off his slippers and entered the room.

“Welcome back, Koutarou”

Kiriha was the only one in the room.

The lights were off, and the room was dark.

So Kiriha was lit up by the faint light coming through the window.

Kiriha sat next to the window frame and stared out.

Her yukata[6] and beautiful black hair fluttered in the wind coming through the window.

She was looking at the night sea.

But even though she was looking at the night sea, it wasn't pitch black.

It was being lit up by the star- and moonlight.

Oh, so that's why the lights are off...

With the lights in the room on, she wouldn't be able to see the faint water surface.

Kiriha's profile while looking at the sea was strangely gentle.

But she looked even gentler as she looked down on her hand.

She was holding onto a small card from an old card game.

Though the card originally had a metallic shine, time had taken it's toll and it was now barely reflecting the moonlight.

The card had something scribbled on it with solvent ink.

And as Kiriha traced the scribbles her smile got brighter.

She must have some really precious memories involving that card...

Kiriha's expression, her fingertips gentle movements and her earnest glance led Koutarou to believe she was reminiscing her memories involving that card.

[6] A traditional japanese garment, kind of like a robe

Koutarou also had some things he had precious memories off, so he understood Kiriha's feelings.

What is this... just looking at this scene I feel relieved...

Koutarou saw Kiriha's smile every day.

She would purposefully show it to Koutarou.

But the smile he saw now was different from any smile she had shown him so far.

Oddly enough, this struck a chord that deep inside of Koutarou.

And for some reason Koutarou dropped his guard around Kiriha.

“What's wrong Koutarou, standing up over there?”

Kiriha broke the silence.

She looked at Koutarou and smiled.

The smile she showed him was very similar to when she had gazed at the card.

“Ah, u-uhm...”

Koutarou couldn't say he was staring at her in admiration and hurriedly looked for an excuse.

But fortunately he found an excuse regarding what she held in her hand.

“You looked like you were valuing that card a lot, so I was just wondering what it is”

“It doesn't suit me right? I'm well aware of that, but I just can't part ways with it”

As Kiriha said that she gazed down on the card again and smiled wryly.

But Koutarou shook his head.

“You don't have to part ways with it. It's your treasure right?”

“...Koutarou?”

Kiriha looked at Koutarou suspiciously.

She was puzzled by Koutarou's words.

“What's the matter, Kiriha-san?”

“I thought you would laugh to see I have something like this. So I was just slightly surprised”

“It doesn't matter who you are Kiriha-san, I have no intentions of laughing at someone else’s memories. Besides, I also have stuff like that hidden away too”

As Koutarou was joking around Kiriha's smile returned, it was the mysterious smile that struck a chord deep inside of Koutarou.

“...Thanks Koutarou”

“You won't get anything for thanking me you know”

As Koutarou said that to hide his embarrassment, Kiriha shook her head.

“That's fine. I've already received enough from you”

“H-Hey...”

Koutarou showed a puzzled expression.

Something about Kiriha was fundamentally different.

You could say she had an honest and transparent will, either way she had a different atmosphere around her.

And Koutarou found that preferable.

Even though he knew he couldn't let his guard down around Kiriha.

“I got this card a long time ago from the person I loved. And I haven't seen him ever since...”

“Do you want to see him?

“Yeah, I want to see him... But I don't know what to do if we met...”

Kiriha would normally lie and scheme, but the thought of using her own memories didn't cross her mind.

Which meant this was the first time she had shown Koutarou a bit of her true self.

She was showing Koutarou her gratitude for not laughing about her card.

Is she trying to trick me again? No, she doesn't seem to be but... No, no, this is Kiriha-san we're talking about. I can't let my guard down. But are these really the eyes of a liar?

But Koutarou didn't understand that and he was confused by her sudden confession.

“Ah, there they are! Koutarou and Kiriha, you two hurry up and come too!”

“Wah!?”

With Sanae suddenly appearing, Koutarou was so surprised he felt as if his heart was about to stop.

For good or bad, Kiriha was the only thing in Koutarou's mind.

“I-It's just Sanae...”

“What's wrong Koutarou, you're making a strange face. It's disgusting”

“L-Leave me alone”

I wasn't being myself, that's right, coming to the beach, I'm just feeling a bit generous...

Though he had been incredibly surprised by Sanae's appearance, it let him recollect himself.

“Well then, there's a table-tennis table over there, so hurry up and come! We're having a tournament!”

“Oh hoh, that's good to hear!”

Sanae and the others hadn't returned because they found a table-tennis table on their way.

Because of that, Kiriha who was deep in thoughts returned to the room alone.

“Let's go Sanae!”

“Aye aye sir!”

Hearing about table-tennis, the sports-loving Koutarou joyfully dragged Sanae with him and jumped out of the room.

Because of that, Kiriha was once again the only one left in the room.

“...How odd. Why did I tell Koutarou all that...?”

Kiriha was surprised at the fact that she revealed a bit of her true self to Koutarou.

Although she was happy that he hadn't laughed about her card, in the fight for room 106, revealing herself would only serve as a minus for Kiriha.

But even then, she couldn't keep herself from talking.

She felt like she wanted to let him know.

“How odd. This is almost as if our situation had been reversed...”

Kiriha would try to enter Koutarou's mind whenever she got the chance in order to obtain room 106.

Instead, Koutarou had entered her mind.

“A tactician outsmarting oneself... Fufufufu”

But despite what Kiriha had said, she wasn't regretting her decision.

Part 4

Koutarou and the others went to bed after midnight.

Normally, everyone would stay up a while longer, but everyone was tired after playing all day.

On top of that, they still had two more days to play on the beach, so instead of forcing themselves they decided to just go to bed.

But seven people sleeping in a six tatami mat room was not an easy task.

And it wasn't just the lack of space, but the narrowness and heat were a big problem.

In the end, Sanae would sleep by the ceiling, and Yurika who had lost in rock-paper-scissors would sleep in a sleeping bag, so for a time being the problems were solved.

However that would not deal with the heat problem, fortunately being so close to the beach, by 1 o'clock the temperature had dropped enough to sleep.

By 2 o'clock, everyone had fallen into a deep slumber.

But the real problems with sleeping were just about to begin.

“....Hm... H-Huh...?”

Ruth was the first to notice the change.

Even when she tried to roll around, her body was unable to move.

She felt like something warm wrapped around her entire body.

“Fuh.... Fuh...”

A breath that didn't belong to Ruth stroked her cheek repeatedly.

And the smell of an unknown body soap reached her nose.

What is this, I wonder...

She didn't know what was wrapped around her body.

But as a hot breath stroked her cheek, Ruth lowered her guard and felt a strange sense of freedom.

So Ruth entrusted herself to that powerful warmth.

“This is mine...”

A man's voice whispered into her ear.

And the something wrapped around her body tightened its grip and Ruth felt an even deeper sense of security.

A man's voice...

However, after realizing that, Ruth quickly woke up.

“W-What!?”

With her eyes wide open, the first thing Ruth saw was the figure of a man on top of her.

The perverts she had met at the beach and hot springs came to mind and Ruth tensed up.

I-I'm being, a-attacked again...!?

Ruth couldn't say a word due to her surprise and fear.

She was unable to scream, and she couldn't do anything but stare at the face of the man in front of her.

That was when faint light came through the window and lit up the man's face.

Thanks to that, Ruth was able to identify the man.

“...Eh? S-Satomi-sama!?”

That face belonged to Koutarou.

Once she recognized him, Ruth's tension vanished immediately.

“Oh, it was just you, Satomi-sama... Please don't surprise me like that... geez...”

Ruth let out a sigh of relief as Koutarou's breath stroked her cheek again.

And the sense of security she had felt before returned.

Ruth kept at it for a while until the reality of the situation struck her.

“...Eh? So this is Satomi-sama!?”

Once she realized that, Ruth tensed up once more.

At the same time her mind goes blank, and she became unable to reason.

“S-Satomi-sama is, desiring me... desiring... ahhh!”

Ruth felt the same fear she had felt when faced with the perverts.

She had been gripped by a strong sense of surprise and embarrassment, and a slight sense of joy.

“W-W-W-What should I do!? I-I'm not prepared! Satomi-sama, this is too sudden!!”

“I won't hand it over to anyone...”

As those words leak out of Koutarou's mouth, Ruth panics and tenses up even further.

“F-Fuaaaaah!!”

At that moment, all power left her body.

“I-If you say something like that, I'll...!!”

Coming from a noble family and being raised in an environment with only girls, this situation was far too much for Ruth.

If it had been someone she hated she might have been fine, but since it was Koutarou things were different.

At that time, Koutarou brought his face closer to her, and Ruth's intuition told her he was going to kiss her.

And Ruth recalled when she imagined kissing Koutarou back at the lottery tent.

“T-This... At this rate I'll.... I'll...!”

I-It's fine right!? I'm being desired and embraced so I can't escape; it's not just my imagination and selfishness right!?

Ruth finally gave up, raised her face and closed her eyes.

Thank god... It was my misunderstanding...I thought he didn't care about my swimsuit appearance... he really does see me as a woman...

“I found this tree Mackenzie. If you want a beetle go find your own tree...”

But unfortunately, Koutarou didn't see Ruth as a woman, but rather a large tree with several beetles in it.

“Eh...?”

At that moment, Ruth's mind goes blank once more.

“...I won't hand over a single one to you...”

“H-He's just dreaming...?”

Ruth finally understood everything.

Koutarou had an unbelievably poor sleeping posture.

He would always roll around when he slept, to the point where Ruth would always step on him.

This time, Ruth just happened to be in the way.

He was only clinging on to Ruth because he thought she was a tree.

“I win this year, Mackenzie... Guhahaha...”

“He's not after me but, beetles...?”

Ruth's throbbing heart, her feeling of being desired and belief that she was about to get kissed were all her misunderstanding.

That reality was just far too cruel.

“N-Nooooo! This can't be trueee!”

Ruth began struggling to escape from the harsh reality and Koutarou.

She desperately pushed back Koutarou's chest and started screaming.

“A-An earthquake... this is dangerous...”

“Noooooooooooooooo!!”

Koutarou mistook it for an earthquake and held Ruth even tighter.

But Ruth didn't stop because of that and Koutarou tossed around while still holding onto her.

“Kyaaaa!”

“Gue”

“Kyaaa, w-who just touched my breasts!?”

“W-What, what's going on!?”

Koutarou energetically rolled around with Ruth.

They knocked over Yurika, touched Shizuka's breasts and stepped on Theia's face.

The only ones who were safe was Kiriha who had noticed the commotion and Sanae who was sleeping by the ceiling.

“Alright, let's go Hachi!”

“Got it, Aniki!”

“Satomi-kun, you pervert!!

“Dieeee!! You'll pay for this with your life!!”

“Satomi-sama you idiot!!”

The ghost hunters were planning on sneaking into the room as everyone had fallen asleep but as they tried to enter through the window they were blown away by a stray bullet.

“...H-Hachi... j-just exactly, what happened?”

“W-Who knows? But we found out something, Aniki”

“What?”

“We should wait until that ghost is alone...”

“T-That's what I was thinking... at this rate, we'll get killed...”

The two people were thrown to the foot of the inn and then fainted.

And just like that, their third attempt ended in a failure.

“What are you doing Satomi-kun? Keep it together. What time do you think it is, geez...”

“I am truly sorry. I have no excuses. I completely forgot about my own poor sleeping posture”

It was now 2:30 in the night.

In the lit up room, Koutarou was repeatedly apologizing to the girls.

“Besides, what kind of dream could you have to make you roll around the room?”

“Well, me and Mackenzie were hunting for beetles when suddenly an earthquake happened. I held onto the tree with all my might, but apparently that's when I started rolling around”

“It was only shaking because you were rolling around. You really are an idiot... Besides, you were hunting beetles at your age?”

“Even if you say that, there was a big one over eight centimeters. As a japanese man I couldn't just not—”

“Satomi-sama, that’s enough with the beetles! It's really unpleasant!”

“S-Sorry”

All the girls were angry, but Ruth who had been tossed around with Koutarou was especially so.

She was so angry her usual obedient attitude seemed like a dream.

The only ones that weren't angry were Kiriha who hadn't gotten involved in the commotion and Yurika who was out cold.

“Hey, pleb”

At that time, Theia pulled on Koutarou's sleeve and whispered to him.

“What?”

“What did you do to Ruth? That rage is abnormal. Are you sure all you did was holding onto her and tossing about?”

“Yeah, supposedly that's all but...”

Of course, Koutarou had no clue about why Ruth was so angry.

All he was doing was hunting for beetles.

“Hmm. That's unusual... This is the first time Ruth has gotten that angry at someone other than me”

“This is bad...”

“When she's like that it's best to leave her alone. It takes about a week for her to cool down”

“Your Highness! Satomi-sama! What are you whispering for!?”

Ruth's eyes were burning with rage.

“N-Nothing”

“I-It's nothing, nothing at all”

The both of them easily backed off and stopped talking.

“...Don't take me down with you”

“Don't be so selfish. You're the one who started talking to me”

“Are you listening to me, you two!?”

Sanae understood Koutarou's and the other's feelings better than anyone else.

“…”

That was because she was the closest to Koutarou and the fact that she was a ghost.

She had a good grasp of how Koutarou and the others felt about one another, more so than the others.

Theia and Ruth are interested in Koutarou... I need to do something fast or Koutarou will get along better with them than with me

“What's wrong Sanae? You're making a funny face”

“K-Koutarou!?”

Sanae's train of thought was stopped by none other than Koutarou.

“I'm sorry, you're angry too right?”

“I-I'm not really angry. I'm not one of the victims”

“Really? Then why are you making that kind of face?”

“Why do you care about me!? In the end we're just enemies!”

In the end, we're just enemies...

Sanae was shocked by her own words.

Koutarou and Sanae were enemies.

In the end, one of them had to leave.

That obvious reality put a damper on Sanae's feelings.

Compared to them, Koutarou and Theia were not strictly enemies.

Theia was after room 106 but in the end she was trying to make Koutarou an ally as well.

She had no need to chase out Koutarou.

She knew this from the very beginning, but right now Sanae couldn't accept that reality.

“Well, it's true that we're enemies. It's just as you say”

Koutarou dropped his shoulders and the conversation stopped.

'*It's true that we're enemies*'...

Koutarou's words pierced through Sanae.

Even though she knew that's how Koutarou would respond.

Despite knowing, it still shocked Sanae.

I... can’t... I'm going... crazy...

The reality she was well aware of, and the unease growing day by day.

Tormented by that, the innocent smile on Sanae's face disappeared.

Sanae's Crisis

Part 1

Tuesday, August 12th

The next day, the weather was clear.

Koutarou and the others were about to spend their second day at the beach.

“Yurika, what are you up to?”

“Shhh, Shhh”

Koutarou was on his way back to his parasol after buying some yakisoba[7] when he saw Yurika nervously observing her surroundings and hiding as she moved around.

Yurika normally looked suspicious, but this time she stood out even more.

“...Are you pretending the enemy magical girls have come to attack?”

“You're wrong! I don't want the cosclub members to find me!”

Koutarou assumed this was a part of cosplaying, but Yurika just wanted to escape from the cosplay society.

Yurika was behaving so suspiciously to avoid the eyes of the cosplay society members playing far away.

“Why?”

[7] A type of japanese noodles

“The cosclub is trying to catch me so they can drag me to the Comiha event the day after tommorow!”

“Why don't you just go then?”

That way, room 106 would be more peaceful.

“I don't want to”

“Besides, you have friends at Comiha right?”

“I don't! Why do you keep teasing me like this, Satomi-san?!”

“Idiot, if you keep shouting they'll find you”

“R-Right”

Yurika headed towards some rocks in order to hide.

The plan was to hide until the cosplay society gave up.

“...You're not being honest at all”

Watching Yurika leave, Koutarou opened the box of yakisoba he just bought.

As the thin plastic box opened, the fragrant smell of yakisoba leaked out.

"Having come all the way to the beach, I can't leave without eating this”

The yakisoba filled Koutarou's mouth, along with a thick taste that spread throughout it.

Because of the people swimming in the sea, yakisoba from a seaside restaurant has a thicker taste to make up for the loss of taste.

“Do you want a taste to, Sanae?”

Having affirmed the taste, Koutarou stopped his chopsticks for a moment and tapped his own shoulder while looking at Sanae who was sitting down a bit away.

Sanae stared at the sand as she responded.

She didn't even try to look at Koutarou.

So it was no use...

Koutarou was slightly dissapointed after hearing her answer.

In reality, Koutarou had bought the yakisoba because he wanted to talk to Sanae.

Sanae had been acting strangely since this morning.

Not trying to do anything, she was thinking of something with a gloomy expression.

Or so you'd think, but she was constantly staring at Koutarou.

But as Koutarou would notice she hurriedly looked elsewhere.

With Sanae, who would always have an energetic smile, depressed like this, the atmosphere around Koutarou and the others got awkward.

Thanks to the cosplay society who didn't know about Sanae, the atmosphere wasn't completely hopeless.

“Just what exactly is wrong? You've been like this since the morning”

“Just leave me alone... Why do you care about me? We're enemies!”

Sanae said that as she sulked.

“Even if you say we're enemies, when you're making a face like that all the time—”

“I told you to leave me alone! Don't bother with me! It was strange for us to get along since we're enemies!”

Sanae yelled at Koutarou.

Tears were forming in her eyes.

Sanae... you...

Koutarou was more shocked by her deep sadness and anger than her words.

Her eyes were desperately pleading for something.

But Koutarou couldn't tell what it was.

He couldn't imagine what was going inside of her head.

While Koutarou was unable to say anything, Sanae stood up and turned her back on him.

And seeing that, Koutarou was finally able to squeeze out some words.

“W-Wait, Sanae, this conversation is not—”

“It's over! If you won't leave me alone, I'll just go somewhere else!”

But in the end, Sanae wouldn't listen to Koutarou and left.

Being able to pass through people, Sanae quickly put a large distance between her and Koutarou.

“Just what's going on with Sanae...”

With the yakisoba still in hand, Koutarou let out a sigh.

He could not understand the reason why she was so depressed.

The only reason he could think of was their discussion last night.

But the only words they exchanged was stating the fact that they were enemies.

Despite Sanae and Koutarou having a truce, it didn't change the fact that they were enemies.

They were both aware that they needed to chase out one another in the end, so he didn't think that fact would hurt Sanae.

“Satomi-kun, were you unable to make up?”

“Yeah, I failed, Landlord-san”

Shizuka nodded as she approached Koutarou.

Theia and the others were behind her.

They were also worried about Sanae.

“Just what is Sanae so angry about...”

Theia looked in the direction Sanae had left and let out a small sigh.

“Sanae-sama looked less like she was angry and more like she was crying”

“I felt the same. It would be best to do something fast, Koutarou”

“That's right. With Sanae like that, I can't get in the mood to solve the problems with room 106”

“Even if you tell me to do something... I don't know what to do...”

Just like the girls, Koutarou was staring at the direction Sanae had left in.

Koutarou couldn't get in the mood ever since Sanae's smile had vanished.

So he wanted to do something about the situation, but he couldn't come up with an answer.

“Argh, I give up on thinking! Just thinking won't get us anywhere!”

Koutarou, who wasn't much of a thinker simply, stopped.

“Landlord-san, I'm going to go look for Sanae. I'll see you later”

Acting before thinking.

That was Koutarou's motto.

“Okay, see you later, Satomi-kun”

Koutarou left his luggage behind and went looking for Sanae.

Alone, Koutarou started by heading in the same direction Sanae had gone.

Part 2

Koutarou made his way through the beach full of people.

After searching for a while, the people surrounding him gradually decreased.

In front of him was a rocky area, which was a no swimming zone.

“Geez”

Koutarou let out a sigh of relief after getting away from the crowded beach.

The footing by the rocky area was worse, but it became easier to walk thanks to the lack of people.

“Satomi-kun!”

A voice called out to Koutarou.

As he looked towards the direction of the voice, he saw a certain parasol on top of a waterbreak.

Harumi was the one calling out to him.

“Sakuraba-senpai!”

As Koutarou waved back to Harumi he climbed up the waterbreak.

“Hello, Satomi-kun”

Koutarou was out of breath after climbing up the waterbreak, and Harumi greeted him with a smile.

She was wearing a light blue summer dress and holding a parasol.

“H-Hello, Sakuraba-senpai. I know it's a bit sudden but, Sa—”

I know it's a bit sudden but, Sanae is missing, have you seen her?

Koutarou was about to say that but he shut his mouth halfway through.

Harumi couldn't see Sanae, so asking would only confuse her.

The only ones who could see Sanae was for some reason those related to room 106.

“Satomi-kun?”

“Ah, no, I was just wondering why you're at this lonely place, Sakuraba-senpai”

“Actually, my villa is just beyond here”

Harumi didn't think anything of Koutarou changing his question partway through as she smiled and pointed towards the mountain path behind her.

Several large houses lined the mountain road that Harumi had pointed at, and one of those houses was the villa Harumi was staying at.

“I see”

“And what about you, Satomi-kun? Why are you at this lonely place?”

“Well, that's...”

As Harumi asked him that, Koutarou hesitated whether or not he should tell her.

But he soon decided to tell her.

Excluding the part where Sanae was a ghost, there wasn't any inconvenience in telling her.

“Actually, I had a fight with one of my friends I came to the beach with”

“Oh dear...”

Harumi opened her eyes wide in surprise and showed a concerned expression.

“So I'm currently looking for my friend”

“I see...”

And Harumi's sadly looked down.

She sensed Koutarou's feelings and was worried about someone she didn't even know.

“Satomi-kun, if it's not too much of a bother, could you tell me reason for why you got into a fight? If you tell me I might be able to help you with something”

“Sakuraba-senpai...”

Koutarou welcomed Harumi's offer.

He felt like she had an answer for this problematic situation.

“Well, I actually don't know”

“You don't know?”

“I have an idea but I have no clue if that's the reason or not...”

“And that's...?”

“When I said the truth out loud that we didn't get along, it seemed to hurt her”

Koutarou changed enemies to not getting along, which was necessary to make it easier for Harumi to understand.

“The truth...”

“But that's the relation we've had, and until now we've quarreled about it. So I don't think that's really the reason for it”

From the start Koutarou and Sanae were enemies and didn't get along.

And since they were enemies they would always bother and insult each other.

And Koutarou didn't think that it would all of a sudden hurt Sanae.

“I see... Then she might be hurt”

But Harumi didn't think that way.

She came up with an answer after hearing Koutarou's explanation.

“You understand!?”

“Yes. Probably...”

Harumi showed a small smile and began explaining like a mother admonishing her child.

“We are both club members right?”

“Yes, you're always helping me out a lot”

“But, I can also say it like this”

Harumi stopped talking and looked directly at Koutarou.

“...That we're utter strangers that happen to be in the same club”

As she said that, Koutarou felt her words were cruel and cold.

He hated hearing her say that.

“That's...”

“Another way to say it”

Harumi revealed a warm smile, and at the same time warmth returned to her words.

“If you had said that when we first met I wouldn't have thought much of it”

She put her hands in front of her chest and smiled.

“But right now, if I had heard that I would be sad. If you had said we are complete strangers, even if it's the truth, I would be very sad”

“...”

Even if it's the truth...

Those words echoed in Koutaoru's head.

“What about you, Satomi-kun?”

“...Same here. If you said we are complete strangers I would be shocked”

Koutarou nodded at Harumi's words.

“I think it's the same for that person”

Harumi looked towards the ocean as she said that, her eyes were gently and sad.

Almost as if even though she was hurt, she was trying to be considerate of somebody's feelings.

“I know it's the truth. At first I really felt that way. But as time passed those feelings changed. I hated just thinking that way. There must be something else. I wanted there to be. Isn't that what that person is thinking?”

“She's...”

That was something Koutarou hadn't thought of.

He hadn't even imagined that something inside Sanae had changed.

“But you said the plain truth to that person, Satomi-kun. I think that was the same as calling us complete strangers”

“Ah...”

At that instant, Koutarou remembered the words Sanae had said.

“I told you to leave me alone! Don't bother with me! It was strange for us to get along since we're enemies!”

Did Sanae hate thinking that we were just enemies? But I told her that we were just enemies. So she was hurt and left?

“I'm sure that person thought it was very sad. Because I also want Satomi-kun to think of me as a friend. I don't want to hear you say we're just complete strangers...”

“So that's why...!”

Harumi's words explained Sanae's actions.

Koutarou felt she was absolutely correct.

“Then what should I do, senpai!? What do I have to say to get her to forgive me!?”

There was no longer any room for doubt.

He was convinced that Sanae was hurt because of that.

So Koutarou sought for an answer from Harumi.

He felt she would give him the answer he needed.

“...I'm sure you already know the answer, Satomi-kun”

Harumi smiled gently, letting Koutarou feel at ease.

“Satomi-kun, you don't feel the same as before right?”

“My...”

When they first met, Koutarou only thought of Sanae as an enemy.

That she was an evil spirit possessing his room.

But over these months, those feelings had gradually changed.

It's true that we're still enemies. But that's not all. If it was, there wouldn't be a truce. And she wouldn't possess me either. And because she didn't understand she—”

“I got it! Thank you very much, Sakuraba-senpai! I'll be going now!”

“Yes. I'll pray for you to make up”

Finding his answer, Koutarou began running.

He didn't even look back at Harumi who was nodding.

Having decided on his next action, he ran straight for it.

That was one of Koutarou's good parts.

“Satomi-kun...”

But Harumi had a sad look in her eyes as she saw him off.

They were not the eyes of someone watching their underclassmen running off to make up with their friend.

And when she could no longer see Koutarou, she let out a sigh.

“...I want you to think of me as a friend, huh...”

Harumi wanted Koutarou to think of her as a friend.

That was an undeniable truth.

She had felt that way for a while now.

“But...”

But right now, that was not all.

There should be something else too.

She wanted there to be.

Some day, Harumi had began feeling that way.

“I'm... a coward and... a liar...”

She was unable to do the same thing she had told Koutarou to do.

And that fact was sad and painful for her.

Part 3

As Koutarou and Harumi parted ways, Sanae was sitting alone at a cliff.

She was on the other side of the coast, at a small cliff surrounded by rocks.

Despite being a small cliff, it offered a great view, overlooking the ocean.

“Stupid Koutarou... you don't even know how I feel...”

But Sanae, who was alone and holding her knees, didn't look at that beautiful sight.

Neither did the seagulls cries nor the waves crashing into the cliff.

“But, why do I feel so lonely and sad...”

Sanae was occupied thinking of herself and Koutarou.

She and he were enemies.

After arguing with Koutarou, she could clearly remember that, but for some reason she felt a heavy sadness and loneliness.

“Even though I wanted to chase him out when we first met...”

Even though they were supposed to be enemies, before she knew it, thinking that way was painful.

She couldn't believe that she felt that way.

The obvious fact that they were enemies didn't feel that obvious to her.

She was confused by her change of heart.

And while feeling confused, she took it out on Koutarou and ran away from him.

She knew he hadn't done anything wrong.

It was natural for Koutarou to think of her as an annoyance and an evil spirit.

She had brought that on herself.

But even though she understood, she couldn't hold back her feelings.

“It'd be better if I just returned to the way I was before I met Koutarou... He's an... enemy after all”

Sad, lonely and being crushed by her own feelings, Sanae looked incredibly small as she held her knees.

She let out another deep sigh.

But no matter how many times she sighed, her feelings didn't revert back to what they had been.

And as Sanae was sighing, yet another girl sighed, not too far away from her.

It was Nijino Yurika.

“My pursuers are... gone!? Thank god, I finally got away~!”

Unlike Sanae, Yurika's sigh was one of relief.

Yurika had come this way in order to escape her pursuers from the cosplay society.

If she was caught she would be forced to the event to the day after tomorrow, and she felt truly relieved.

“I definitely don't want to take part at that event. If I do something like that, Satomi-san will— Eh, isn't that Sanae-chan?”

Yurika spotted Sanae sitting by the cliff.

“What is she doing at a place like that?”

Having desperately been running around since this morning, Yurika hadn't noticed Koutarou's and Sanae's delicate situation.

So she was confused by Sanae being all alone.

In her head, Sanae being next to Koutarou was obvious.

“Alright, let's take a look”

Yurika didn't really have anything else to do, and she didn't want to go back and be caught by the cosplay society.

And although she was bad with ghosts, she had recently gotten used to Sanae and she had no real reason to hate her.

Because of hat, Yurika approached on the rocky area.

“Huh?”

And as she closed in on Sanae, Yurika noticed somebody other than herself approaching Sanae.

“N-Not good! It might be my pursuers!”

Yurika thought the cosplay society members had tracked her down, so she stopped moving and hid behind a nearby rock.

“Aniki, this is the perfect opportunity! W-We're so close to being rich!”

“Calm down Hachi. Even the best of chances will run away if you're not careful”

“Yes, as expected, Aniki, you're so reliable!”

“I might be a little too cool”

But Yurika had no need to be afraid.

The somebodies approaching Sanae were the two ghost hunters.

After failing three times, they had waited for Sanae to be alone and they were now finally making their move.

“Our opponent is alone, and we are well prepared. If we fail here we'll be a laughing stock. I'm counting on you Hachi”

“Got it!”

While they had waited for Sanae to be alone, they had fully prepared themselves.

Their equipment and plans were flawless.

They had confidence this time would go well.

“Get in position, Hachi”

“Roger!”

The two of them closed in on Sanae.

Sanae only noticed the crisis she was in when something white blocked her sight.

“W-What is this!?”

White smoke surrounded Sanae.

The smoke came from a smoke screen the ghost hunters had made.

Because they had used branches off of sacred trees to make this smoke screen it was capable of blinding ghosts.

“*cough* *cough* W-What is this!?”

But since they were so close to the beach, the smoke screen had soon blown away.

As Sanae regained her sight, the ghost hunters were already in the middle of their next attack.

“Even dead, I can't escape from the shackles of free economy”

“It can't be helped. Money filled with obsessions[8] are just too good to give up”

[8] Essentially by obsessions they mean the negative feelings that previous owner of the (in this case) bill held. It seems that the evil spirits think of bills filled with obsessions as a snack.

“Yeh. Gonna give it my all. I want to fill my belly with something good”

“I ate a dollar bill the other day and it was incredibly delicious. I wonder if I can get my pay in dollar bills”

As Sanae was blinded by the smokescreen she had been surrounded by several ghosts.

“W-Who are these guys!?”

The ghosts numbered well over 20 and they were all around her.

Their gender, age and clothes were all different, they had no common feature.

Almost like a random crowd of people turned into ghosts.

“Go, evil spirits! Earn your salary!”

They were actually low paid evil spirits the ghost hunters had called in as help to capture Sanae.

Those ghosts were the last ace up the sleeves the ghost hunters had.

“No, the true delicacy is the bill from a hyperinflation country”

“Woah, just hearing that makes me drool”

“Once you've eaten one of those you won't want to touch the bills of an economically stable country”

“Is that really so... I think there are unique obsessions in a stable country. Like failing at the stock market or tributes to women. That's the way I like it”

“A developed taste... hearing you describe it, I kinda want to taste that too...”

“Quit talking and go!”

“Okaaaay”

And as Sanae was puzzled about the situation she was in, the ghosts attacked from all sides.

“Kyaaaa! Nooooo! Idiots! Perverts! Creeps! Where do you think you're touching!?”

“... I kinda feel like I'm doing something really bad”

“Well she's just a little girl”

“Aren't we actually doing something bad?”

“There's no need to worry, we're evil spirits after all”

“Yeah”

Completely surrounded, Sanae was easily caught by the evil spirits.

They grabbed her hands and legs and she was unable to move.

And as Sanae was immobilized, the ghost hunters approached with their insect nets.

“Looks like it went well, Aniki!”

“When we get serious, something like this is nothing to us!”

Their fourth attempt was going all according to plan.

But there was someone watching Sanae in her desperate times.

That was Yurika who had mistook the ghost hunters for her own pursuers.

“S-Sanae-chan is!?”

After hearing the commotion and deciding it couldn't be her pursuers, Yurika peeked out from the rock and saw an unbelievable sight on top of the cliff.

“L-Let me go! I said let me go!!”

Countless ghosts surrounded Sanae and deprived her of her freedom.

She desperately tried escaping, but the ghosts were too strong and she had no chance.

“It's over! You're gonna get caught by us and then sold off!”

“What do you mean sold off!!”

“I've never seen a ghost with as much spiritual energy as you maintain their stability. Someone like you would fetch a high price from a connoisseur!”

“Weren't you two just perverts!?”

“What are you saying after all this?!”

“We're ghost hunters! Bounty hunters that specialize in capturing ghosts!”

Ghost hunters!? Impossible, that sounds like something right out of an anime, there's no way that—

At first, Yurika couldn't believe that ghost hunters truly existed.

But she stopped her train of thought halfway through.

It wouldn't be strange for them to exist. Besides, magical girls exist, so it wouldn't be too strange. And besides, unlike Satomi-kun, I believe in people

Yurika believed them mostly out of spite of Koutarou.

“B-B-But what should I do!? I need to save Sanae-chan! But there are so many ghosts! I-I-I-I don't know what to do!”

Believing it was fine, but Yurika had no idea on how to handle the situation.

She wanted to save Sanae, but she absolutely hated ghosts.

Just looking at them, she began trembling and was unable to move.

“B-But if I just leave them, Sanae-chan will...!”

“Kyaaaaaa!”

As Yurika was thinking of her next move, Sanae was wrapped up in the insect net.

“Nooooo, save me! Somebody!”

“It's no use, nobody is coming to save you”

“Your friends are far away playing. And there's no way someone who could actually hear your voice would be nearby. Just give up”

“No way! I don't want to be sold off!”

However, Sanae's words finally made Yurika make her decision.

“I-I'll go save her! I'm afraid of ghosts but, being scared won't help, Sakuraba-senpai would go save her!”

Yurika mustered all of her courage and moved her trembling body.

She remembered Harumi's words during the obstacle marathon.

I can't lose to myself! I need to be stronger, like Sakuraba-senpai!

“Alright, I can do this!!”

Eventually the trembles stopped allowing her body to move freely.

I'll call out Angel Halo, transform and save Sanae-chan!

Yurika strongly focused her mind as she reached out her right hand.

This was to call out her cane.

“Come! Angel—”

“Found you, Yurika-cha~n!!”

“President, I've found here! Yurika is over here!”

However, an unexpected obstacle appeared.

It was the cosplay society who had constantly been tracking down Yurika.

“Secure the target!”

As the president gave the orders, the five members jumped at Yurika all at once.

“O-Oh no!? A-At this important time!?”

Yurika hurriedly braced herself but it was already too late.

She was deprived of her freedom, just like Sanae had been.

“Alright, hurry up and bring her back to the hotel, we're going to prepare our outfits!”

“Bringing a spare outfit turned out to be the right call, president!”

“Wait, wait, Sanae-chan is... Sanae-chan is getting abducted!!”

“Sanae-chan?”

As Yurika desperately pleaded, the cosplay society stopped.

They looked around for the girl Yurika had called 'Sanae-chan'.

But all they could see were two suspicious men holding insect nets.

They couldn't see the evil spirits next to them, or Sanae who was wrapped up in the insect net.

“There's nobody here”

“There is! Can't you see the men have captured a girl on the edge of the cliff!?”

“Wait a second, everybody look! They're yesterday’s perverts!”

“Uwa, creeps, let's go, we don't want anything to do with them. And make sure we bring Yurika with us!”

“Okaaay!”

Obeying the president’s orders, the cosplay society swiftly bound Yurika with a rope.

“Please wait, if we don't save Sanae-chan something horrible will happen!”

“But she's nowhere to be seen”

Despite Yurika's desperate pleas the cosplay society members didn't listen.

Eventually the finished tying up Yurika and they put a gag on her.

“Hmm, Mmmh! HmmhH!”

At this point, there was no longer anything Yurika could do.

They attached Yurika to a long stick and carried her away; they looked like primitive men carrying back their prey.

“Hmmhhmm!!”

“Just hang in there, Yurika-chan. We'll undo the rope and get you into your outfit soon”

“Hmmmm!! MmmHmm!”

And as Yurika was carried away, Sanae was left all alone.

“Let me out of here!!”

Sanae had been put into a mysterious transparent container after being freed from the insect net.

The container was a cylinder, 50 centimeters in diameter and two meters tall, made from some sort of transparent glass.

However the container was sturdy, and didn't budge despite Sanae beating on it.

On top of that, she couldn't pass through the container.

This was a tool that came in set with the insect net, a container used to transport captured ghosts.

“Just give it up already. You've been captured”

“You're on your way to be sold off”

“I don't want that, I don't want to go anywhere! Koutarou! Koutarou!!”

Just as all hope had been lost, Koutarou's name left Sanae's mouth.

As Sanae kept beating the container from the inside she called out Koutarou's name.

“Save me, Koutarou!”

However, her desperate screams couldn't reach him.

Part 4

As Sanae was being kidnapped, Koutarou was closing in on the site.

If he had only been a bit faster, he could have heard Sanae's screams as she was being taken away.

However, her voice didn't reach due to their small gap.

But, that didn't mean that all hope was lost.

“Oh, if it isn't Satomi-kun. What a strange place to meet”

“If it isn't the cosclub. Why are you all the way out here?”

As Koutarou was headed towards the direction where Sanae had been kidnapped, he met the cosplay society who were on their way back.

“Look, look Koutarou-kun, we caught our prey!”

“Hm! Mhh, Hmmmhh!!”

“Y-Yurika!?”

Their prey was none other than Yurika.

She was being carried along a long stick, almost as if she was about to be roasted.

Koutarou was at a loss for words because of the appearance which fit her so well.

I see, Yurika was caught in the end... rest in peace...

Koutarou remembered that Yurika had been running away from the cosplay society as clasped his hands in his mind.

“Hmm, Mhhm! Hm, Mhmmm!!”

And of course, Yurika began struggling.

She screamed something as she violently shook her body.

“Kyaa, Yurika-chan, it's dangerous if you struggle like that!”

“Stay still Yurika-chan!”

Because of Yurika's struggling, the cosplay society members began staggering.

She kept shaking, despite them telling her not to struggle, in fact she instead shook even more.

“Mhh, Hmmmm, Mhhh!!”

Yurika stared at Koutarou with a serious look in her eyes and she desperately moved her mouth and biting the gag.

“Mh, Mhmmmm! Hmmmm!!”

“Yurika?”

Is she trying to tell me something?

Feeling Yurika's behavior was strange Koutarou looked into her eyes.

They weren't the eyes of somebody holding a grudge, nor were they the eyes of somebody calling for help.

She was trying to appeal to Koutarou with the serious look in her eyes.

What's up with Yurika... She's not acting like herself...?

Since Yurika wasn't acting like her normal self, Koutarou wanted to talk to her.

And he also had something he wanted to ask her.

“Excuse me, but could I talk to Yurika alone?”

“Hmmm!!”

As Koutarou said that, Yurika's eyes sparkled.

As I thought, something happened...

Seeing her act like that, Koutarou had a bad feeling.

“Just the two of you? Is it a complicated story?”

“Well, yes. It's an extremely private conversation between me and Yurika about a common acquaintance”

Koutarou didn't just want to hear her story, but he also wanted to ask her about Sanae's whereabouts.

But if the cosplay society were around, things would get complicated.

So Koutarou decided to decieve them by concealing the truth.

“Hmm! Mh!”

Sensing Koutarou's intentions, Yurika began nodding.

Seeing that, the president nodded.

“I understand. But you can't let her run, okay? We finally caught her after all”

“I got it”

“Everyone, put Yurika down for a minute”

“Okaaay!”

The cosplay society lowered Yurika to the ground, and left Koutarou alone with her.

And once they were far enough away, Koutarou squatted down next to Yurika and put his hand on the gag.

“I'm taking it off”

“Hm!”

As Koutarou untangled the knots, Yurika opened her mouth wide.

“S-S-Satomi-san! Satomi-san has been kidnapped and there are a lot of Sanae-chans and perverted evil spirits!!”

But her words were a mess, and Koutarou couldn't understand what she was trying to say.

“Calm down, please speak English”

“There's no time to calm down!”

“Just take a deep breath”

“O-Okaaay!”

Listening to Koutarou, Yurika took a deep breath and she calmed down slightly.

“So, what happened?”

“Yesterday’s perverts took Sanae-chan, Satomi-san!”

“W-What!? Are you serious!?”

“Yes! It seems like their real goal was Sanae-chan!”

“But she was captured even though she can pass through walls!? She's a ghost, and how!? She got kidnapped!? How did Sanae!?”

This time, Koutarou couldn't speak clearly.

Regretting having hurt Sanae, Koutarou had gone out looking for her.

But she had now been captured by the perverts.

Because of that, Koutarou was now as confused as Yurika had been.

“Please calm down, Satomi-san! Please speak English!”

“S-Sorry”

Koutarou took several deep breaths and repeated his question.

“But Sanae is a ghost! How was she captured!? She can pass through walls you know!? How could they kidnap her!?”

“A lot of strange ghosts ganged up on her, and then they captured her with the insect nets! That rope is probably not normal!”

“But why target Sanae!? Who are those guys!?”

“They said they were ghost hunters! And that they would sell off Sanae-chan!”

“Sell off Sanae-chan!?”

At that moment, Koutarou remembered the perverts’ two previous surprise attacks.

“He's right, young man! We're only trying to capture that small girl from before so we can sell her off!”

“Please believe us! We have no interest in normal girls!”

“I-It's just a misunderstanding! We're not into peeping! We have no interest in your normal bodies!”

“That's right! We only want to lock in that small girl and sip on some sweet juices!”

The two of them had repeatedly tried explaining themselves like that.

However Koutarou and the others completely misinterpreted that and treated them like perverts, but in reality, that was not what they were.

“Damnit! They meant it in that way!?”

However it wasn't Koutarou and the other’s fault.

Who would even believe there were people making a living off of selling ghosts?

It was the same reasoning behind not believing Yurika.

“You're not lying, are you Yurika!?”

So even though partially believed her, he couldn't keep himself from confirming it with Yurika.

Koutarou couldn't simply outright believe that ghost hunters were real.

Even though he had been living with a ghost for a while, that fact didn't change.

“Of course! You already don't believe I'm a magical girl, there's no way I would ruin my credibility even further by lying!”

But hearing Yurika's answer, Koutarou readily agreed.

“There's no way I would ruin my credibility even further by lying!”

Those words were overwhelmingly persuasive.

“...You're right. Sorry for doubting you, Yurika”

Koutarou deeply bowed at Yurika.

He had a serious look in his eyes, and was apologizing from the bottom of his heart.

“That's fine but for some reason I'm getting really irritated!”

That was because Koutarou believed in ghost hunters but not that Yurika was a magical girl.

It meant that the more serious Koutarou was apologizing, the less he believed that she was a magical girl.

“I can understand why Sanae-chan is always so angry!! Ahhhhh, geez!!”

Yurika let out a furious voice.

His reaction irritated Yurika to no end.

“So Yurika, do you have any clue to where they headed?”

“Huh!? … N-No, I don't. I only know that she was carried away by the crowd of ghosts. After that, I was tied up and carried away”

Yurika was still bound and rolling around on the ground.

“A crowd of ghosts...? That's it! Yurika, you're certain that they were with a lot of ghosts, right?”

“Yes, do you have any any good ideas?”

“Probably! I'll be going now Yurika! Thank's for telling me!”

Saying that, Koutarou stood up.

“Ah, wait, Satomi-san!?”

“See you later! I'm going to save Sanae!”

Koutarou began running.

His goal was of course to save Sanae who had been kidnapped.

If he didn't he couldn't talk to her.

Just hang in there Sanae, I'm coming to save you!

As Sanae was being kidnapped her words didn't reach Koutarou.

However, thanks to Yurika, Sanae's words properly reached him.

“Wait! Don't just save Sanae-chan, save me too! Please save me! I'll definitely be useful!”

“Don't force yourself! You hate ghosts right? Your feelings and information is enough! Thank you, Yurika! I'll definitely repay the favor later!”

Koutarou left after giving Yurika a gentle look.

He was truly grateful, despite being Yurika being a cosplayer, Koutarou was grateful for her courage to offer her help.

Which was why he didn't want to involve her.

“You're wrong! That's not what I mean! Repay the favor now! Please don't leave me, Satomi-saaan!!”

Yurika's lone shouts echoed in the deserted rocky area.

“Yuuurika-chaaan♪ Have you finished talking to Satomi-kun I wonder♪”

“Noooooooooo!”

Thanks to Yurika, Sanae's voiced reached Koutarou, however Yurika's own voice didn't reach him this time either.

Running into his room in the inn, Koutarou started searching through his own bag.

Since it was already evening, Theia, Kiriha, Shizuka and Ruth had already returned to the room.

But Koutarou didn't even look at them.

Part 5

“I know I put it in just in case! It should be...”

Finding Koutaoru's appearance strange, the girls looked at each other.

And as a representative, Shizuka opened her mouth.

“Satomi-kun, what's wrong? Were you able to talk to Sanae-chan?”

“Well you see, Landlord-san, Sanae-chan was taken away by those perverts!”

Koutarou answered while still searching in his bag.

“Eh!?”

“What!?”

“By those people!?”

“Is that true, Koutarou!?”

The girls opened their eyes wide in surprise.

They surrounded Koutarou and demanded an explanation.

“Yeah, there's no mistaking it! Yurika saw them kidnap Sanae! They are ghost hunters or something! Those perverts were after Sanae from the start!

“Yurika did? Are you sure she's not pretending again?”

With Yurika as the source, Kiriha said so without holding back.

Yurika had no credibility.

“It didn't seem like it, and there's no reason for her to lie when she already has next to no credibility, right? If she wanted to fool us she would have made something better up”

“...That is completely correct. No matter how much of an idiot she is, she wouldn't do something that would hurt her standing even more”

“Your highness, that's a bit too...”

And since she had next to no credibility, everyone readily nodded their heads.

Even Ruth who had tried covering for Yurika felt something like that.

“Found it! As long as I have this!”

At that point, Koutarou found the item he was looking for in his bag.

It was a paper bag from a famous department store.

He strongly held onto the paper bag and stood up.

And the girls who were looking at him leaned back.

Before the girls could regain their balance, Koutarou ran towards the room's exit.

“I'm going to take back Sanae!”

And before the girls could reply, he had already left the room.

“Ah, wait up, Satomi-kun!”

“Ruth, we're going too”

“As you wish, my princess”

“Karama, Korama, follow me”

“I've been waiting for this Ho-!”

“Let's go save Sanae-chan Ho-!”

The girls ran out of the room slightly behind Koutarou.

The contents of the paper bag Koutarou had taken with him contained some of the religious tools Shizuka had given him during the first days of school.

Koutarou brought charms and likes in case of an emergency.

This is probably part of why Sanae was so hurt...

Koutarou thought to himself as he shoved his hand into the bag.

Deep inside, he believed that Sanae wasn't dangerous enough to justify bringing religious tools with him.

If he did, he wouldn't have let her possess him daily.

He had brought the religious tools with him just because she was an enemy.

After hearing Harumi's explanation, Koutarou understood it as well.

Sanae must have hated just seeing this bag.

“But now I'm glad I brought this with me!”

Koutarou pulled out one of the religious tools from the bag.

It was a tool that looked like an old fashioned radio wrapped in cheap looking plastic.

And 'Ghost detection kit – For those looking 2006' was written on the plastic wrapping.

“I'll be able to find Sanae with this!”

This 'For those looking 2006' was a ghost detection kit manufactured three years ago.

Although it was an old model near its expiration date that Shizuka had gotten from her friend, it was a product that held a big share in the occult industry.

By the way, the manufacturer also manufactured the insect nets the two men were using.

Koutarou was planning on using 'For those looking 2006' to find Sanae.

However, this tool couldn't distinguish between ghosts.

Because of Yurika's information that the two men had a crowd of ghosts with them, Koutarou was going to track down the crowd, and in the process find Sanae.

“...Let's see, Please light up the incense and put it in the upper center of the machine. This incense serves as an antenna. Please make sure you use the attached incense”

Koutarou read the instruction manual for 'For those looking 2006' and prepared it for use.

As could be expected from a product that held a large share of the market, even a beginner like Koutarou had an easy time finishing the preparations.

All that's left is pressing the start button.

“Alright...”

Koutarou swallowed his saliva.

If this failed he would lose his only lead.

Koutarou began getting more and more nervous.

And he carefully moved his finger closer to the start button.

“Please work...”

As Koutarou reached towards the button he braced himself, prayed and pushed the button.

The next moment the machine made a loud noise.

“Ahh!?”

The 'For those looking 2006' created a small explosion in Koutarou's hands.

“*cough* *cough* It exploded!? *cough* *cough*”

Breathing in the smoke from the explosion, Koutarou had a coughing fit.

Fortunately, the explosion wasn't particularly big and Koutarou wasn't injured.

However the 'For those looking 2006' was charred and partially destroyed.

“B-But why did it explode!?”

Koutarou took several deep breaths and voiced his doubts.

He wasn't expecting an answer to that question but by chance he happened to get an answer.

“It seems the spiritual energy oscillator malfunctioned Ho!”

“The delicate oscillator couldn't handle the spiritual energy after deteriorating with age Ho!”

“...It's because you forcibly tried to use it despite its age, Koutarou”

“Kiriha-san...”

The ones who gave Koutarou an answer was Kiriha and her two haniwas.

She picked up the 'For those looking 2006' and approached him with a smile.

“I'm sorry, Satomi-kun. It's all because I gave you old tools closing in on their expiration date...”

Behind Kiriha was Shizuka.

She looked at the 'For those looking 2006' and Koutarou and made an apologetic expression.

“Even Landlord-san...”

Why are the two of them...?

Koutarou didn't understand the reason behind why Kiriha and Shizuka had come, and looked at them with a blank look on his face.

“So what are you going to do now Koutarou? Are you still going to look for Sanae?”

“Finding ghosts with our technology is impossible. We need to find a different method”

“Even Tulip and Ruth-san!?”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Don't worry. Just leave it to me”

“Kurano-san, do you have an idea?”

“W-Wait, are all of you going to help me!?”

Koutarou was confused.

He was surprised by the fact that they were planning on finding Sanae.

“That's right, Satomi-kun. Sanae-chan is almost like your little sister, so of course we need to save her”

“Fufufu. Since you've lost your only lead, it’s a good chance to earn a favor or two. How could I do anything but exploit this chance?”

“You will eventually become my vassal. You don't have the freedom of simply jumping into danger. If you die, my future will be lost”

“I just... if you wish for it, I'll help as much as I can, Satomi-sama... T-That's right, I have to repay you for the swimsuit! It's for the swimsuit!”

The four of them all had their different reasons, but they were all planning on saving Sanae.

“Thanks. Please help me everyone!”

Normally, Koutarou might have refused but now he obediently accepted their offer.

But in this situation, Koutarou had no choice to.

“Leave it to me, Satomi-kun! I won't forgive those perverts specializing in ghosts!”

Shizuka gestured rolling up her sleeves.

She looked she was raring to go.

“Promise me this Koutarou. That once we get back, you'll buy me a swimsuit too”

Kiriha showed a mischievous expression.

However, Koutarou noticed that she had a look of gentleness in her eyes.

“Kukuku, just you see pleb. They'll regret making me an enemy! And you'll learn just how impressive I am!”

Theia put on a smile fitting of a carnivorous beast.

But Koutarou knew that Theia wasn't as much of a tyrant as she made herself out to be.

She was at the very least worried about Sanae.

“Leave it to me, Satomi-sama! I'll help you as much as I can!”

Koutarou didn't find it strange that Ruth wanted to help, but in reality she also had a different reason for helping.

“Well, Kiriha-san, you sounded like you had an idea...”

Koutarou said that in a hurry, he didn't have the time to thank them.

“Yes. Karama, Korama, I'll leave it to you”

As Kiriha nodded , the two haniwas came up to Koutarou.

“Koutarou, we'll scan that broken down machine and mimic it Ho!”

“You can do that!?”

“Leave it to us Ho! Compared to us, that machine is far simpler so mimicking the spiritual energy circuits is easy Ho!”

“Then please do!”

“Roger Ho!”

“Beginning scan Ho!”

Obliging Koutarou's request, the two haniwas stare down the 'For those looking 2006' in Kiriha's hands.

Their normally hollow eyes shot out a red light.

They were guide lights for the scanning.

Combining modern science with spiritual energy, the two haniwas began working using their unique theory.

Koutarou had always felt they were suspicious but this time he couldn't help but trust in them.

“Scan completed Ho-!”

“We're completed preparations Ho-!”

Shortly afterwards they turned back towards Koutarou.

The red light coming out of their eyes had vanished and were back to their normal selves.

“Koutarou, should we amplify the function Ho?”

“Amplify?”

“It's easy to mimic Ho. So tracing the circuits we can power it up Ho! We're excellent Ho-!”

“It's estimated that we can amplify the function by 168% Ho!”

“Then please do it! I want to find Sanae as quickly as possible!”

“Then let's begin Ho! I'll be the detector Ho!”

“Then I'll do the amplifying Ho! Activating synchronous mode to link up Ho!”

The two haniwas began moving, by becoming one they could function as a single machine.

“Setting the amplification rate to 168% Ho!”

“Beginning emulation Ho! Activating the detector circuits!”

And the two haniwas begin replicating the function of the 'For those looking 2006'.

Because of that an explosion amplified by 168% happened.

It was a splendid reproduction.

“Are you complete idiots!? You don't need to replicate that much!”

Covered in an explosion again, Koutarou was scorched and charred in various places.

However, Koutarou's anger burned more intensely than the fires of the explosion.

“Sorry Ho! We forgot to mend the malfunctioning parts Ho!”

“We didn't mean any harm Ho! We'll redo it Ho!”

And like that, although slightly delayed, Koutarou and the others began moving to save Sanae.

The labor union's rebellion

Part 1

Tuesday, August 12th

As Koutarou pulled open the door, it let out a loud screech.

And the smell of dust in the mansion assaulted them.

“Alright then haniwas, are you sure this is it?”

“There's no mistaking it Ho! We're detecting a whole swarm of ghosts Ho!”

“And we can smell Sanae-chan's spiritual energy Ho! She's nearby Ho!”

Koutarou and the others had arrived at a western-styled mansion at the corner of the villa area.

The western-styled mansion stood out from all the other villas.

The outer walls were starting to collapse, the windows were broken, there were cracks in the walls and the exterior was covered in weeds.

Its design alone made it stand out, but the ruined state it was in only served to make the surrounding area look worse.

Since the sun had set and it was starting to get dark, it looked like something right out of a horror movie.

“Aside from the ghosts, I can kind of see signs that there are people inside”

Shizuka peeked in through the open door and looked around.

“You can? I can't feel anything like that”

Koutarou looked around as well but couldn't see any signs.

“Then look over there Satomi-kun. Fresh footprints”

“Ah, you're right...”

Footprints could be seen in the hallway filled with dust.

Koutarou didn't understand what she meant by signs but he could see that the footprints were fresh.

Old footprints would have dust over them, dimming the outline.

“An abandoned mansion that the residents won't go near to, swarms of ghosts, signs of Sanae and signs of people entering recently... There's no mistaking it, this is it”

Going through all of the information, Kiriha made her statement.

And Koutarou agreed with her.

“The problem is if the perverts inside have noticed us or not. And if there are any traps lying in wait”

“You're worrying too much Ruth. If there are any traps we'll just blow them away”

While grinning, Theia passed Koutarou and Shizuka and entered the mansion.

She didn't care about any traps as she boldly walked forward.

“That's dangerous Tulip, we don't know what they could do”

“That goes both ways. Besides, being defensive doesn't suit me. Suppressing and advancing is my motto”

“Still, you're being too reckless”

“If that's what you think then cover my back. That's the duty of a vassal”

“Fine, I got it”

Normally, Koutarou would yell back at her, but this time he obeyed her.

“Fufu, it seems you've finally realized your position as a vassal”

“I'll let it slide this time, and this time only”

As Theia looked back happily, Koutarou looked for something he could use as a weapon inside of the paper bag filled with religious tools.

Koutarou chose a stick with a tag on it that read 'Limited edition, Sacred tree branch – Cypress Stick'

“Yet another weapon fit for a barbarian...”

“At least I don't use a space battleship every time”

The black holes were already above Theia's shoulders and large-scale firearms peeked through.

All of the weapons were built into the space battleship, Blue Knight.

“I hope it doesn't turn into a fight...”

With the situation being the way it is, Ruth was armed, just like Theia.

She wasn't using firearms, but a large sword and shield.

Since she was from a house of knights, she was pretty good with those.

That said, swords and shields had been improved by the latest developments in science and their power was no less than Theia's weapons.

“Karama, Korama, stop the synchronous mode and prepare to fight”

“Understood Ho!”

“Starting to charge the spiritual energy weapons Ho!”

Kiriha ordered her haniwas to prepare for combat.

She herself wasn't armed, but thanks to the combat capabilities of her haniwas she didn't have to.

That said, she looked too defenseless so Koutarou showed her the paper bag.

“Kiriha-san, please use one of these”

“Thank you Koutarou. Then I'll take this”

Kiriha smiled and pulled out a Tamagushi[9].

[9] An offering made from a tree branch, decorated with strips of paper used in Shinto ceremonies

Together with her clothes, as she held it in her hand she gave off the impression of being a shrine maiden.

But strangely enough, it didn't feel like cosplay like in Yurika's case.

It was probably because of her composed atmosphere.

“Once you've finished preparing, follow me! The battle is about to start!”

“Tulip, we might not get into a fight”

“You're too naive pleb! Those perverts are going to be annihilated”

“...Hmm. Well, alright”

Koutarou and the others followed Theia deeper into the mansion.

Although they would always do things their own ways, this time they were all gathered under one objective.

When they first met, that probably wouldn't have happened, but now they didn't think anything of it.

The weapons above Theia's shoulders fired in succession.

She had summoned large-caliber rapid firing guns from the Blue Knight and countless bullets headed towards their targets.

The targets were the armors and stuffed things inside of the residence.

They were pulverized by the hail of bullets.

“Hmph, far too easy. I was expecting more from moving armor and stuffing”

“Don't be unreasonable Tulip. Your weapons are just too strong!”

Theia hadn't shot them to relieve her of her boredom or anything like that.

As Koutarou and the others were exploring the mansion, they had suddenly come to life and attacked.

But before they could even approach, they had been pulverized by Theia's overwhelming firepower.

“Ah geez... what were you going to do if there were people inside...”

After seeing the destroyed decorative knight armors and stuffed bears, Koutarou couldn’t help but shudder at the thought of what would have happened if a person was inside.

“If that had happened, it would have been an unfortunate accident”

However, Theia didn't show any signs of reflecting on her actions, leaving Koutarou amazed.

“Come on now!”

“There's no need to get so excited, pleb. Were you that happy to see my splendor?”

“Not even close!”

“It's alright Satomi-sama. I'm on the lookout for any signs of life”

“Eh, really?”

Koutarou stopped moving after hearing Ruth's words.

“My firearms are controlled by the data Ruth is sending out from the front in order to not attack living people”

“You're kidding!?”

“As if I would kid about this! … Just what do you take me for!?”

“That's because you're trying to kill me from time to time!”

“By the way Kiriha, where is Sanae? Since they're attacking wouldn't it mean we're close?”

Theia changed the topics as the argument fell into Koutarou's favor.

“And she's not even listening...”

”Satomi-sama”

Ruth whispered to Koutarou as he was getting fed up with Theia.

“Please trust her highness today. Although it would be hard to understand, but she is worried about Sanae-sama”

“...Okay”

Because it was none other than Ruth's request, Koutarou backed down.

He at least understood how Theia felt, she wouldn't have helped otherwise.

“Karama, Korama, how about it?”

“Ho-, She's probably underground Ho-! I can sense a large cave below Ho-!”

“There's a stairs leading down just up ahead Ho-!”

“Underground huh... A fitting place for a small time villain to be lurking”

“Ouch, that hits close to home”

Kiriha smiled wryly to Theia's words.

Since she herself had come from underground, Theia's words applied to Kiriha a swell.

“I-It's just a figure of speech! I had no intention of insulting your home!”

Kukuku, Tulip is panicking...

Seeing Theia desperately make excuses, cheered Koutarou up a little.

Part 2

The ghost hunters were watching over Koutarou and the four girls.

In fact, only the above ground part of the mansion was ruined, the basement had been cleaned up and maintained.

Using the ruined mansion exterior as a camouflauge they had made the basement into their base.

All the sides of the underground base were at the very least 25 meters long.

And with five meters to the ceiling, the base was very spacious.

The reason why the basement was so large was because it was originally a play room.

A billiard table, a roulette board and the likes were still left in the room.

The ghost hunters' luggage had also been left in the same place.

There were the tools they needed for their works and things they needed to survive such as beds.

Amongst the luggage was a monitor showing footage captured by a hidden camera inside the mansion.

In total, there were three monitors.

And by switching feeds, they could survey the deserted mansion.

Koutarou and the others were currently being shown on the monitors as they destroyed the interior while they advanced further in.

“Aniki, this is bad! It seems the intruders are aware of the entrance to our underground base!”

“What!?”

One of the ghost hunters watching their progress on the monitor screamed.

And the second ghost hunter who was relaxing on the sofa hurries to his side.

“What happened to the guys defending the mansion!?”

“Well, they were obliterated by the smallest girl! Armor or stuffings won't be able to stop that!”

Evil spirits had been possessing the moving armors and stuffings one at a time.

It was similar to Sanae's poltergeist attack, they would move and attack with the armors, just like how Sanae would throw encyclopedias at Koutarou.

However, the weaponized armors and stuffing would get torn asunder by Theia.

In the end, the lower class ghosts couldn't do anything else.

“Oh yeah, unlike us, they're good at physical attacks...”

“This is bad, at this rate they'll be here any moment! What should we do, Aniki!?”

“Calm down, Hachi!”

The elder brother hit Hachi on the head as he was running around and panicking.

“Then, Then what do we do?”

Hachi stopped moving and stared at his elder brother.

“There's no need to fight them on their own terms. That's why we've been preparing for this kind of scenario. Amongst the evil spirits, there were those that could mess with people directly right? We'll have them mobilize as well and send these intruders packing”

“Ah, do you mean the ones with a higher salary?”

“Why do you think we hired them?”

“As expected, Aniki! I didn't notice at all!”

“And then there's the weapons we made yesterday right? Prepare those as well”

“I got it! I'll get right too it!”

Hachi ran towards the next room right away.

The next room was the hangout for the hired evil spirits.

But one more was looking at the monitor.

“Koutarou... you came to save me...”

It was Sanae that the ghost hunters had captured.

She was still trapped inside of the transparent container.

The hunters had brought Sanae along with the container down to their base, and were waiting for their trade partner to arrive.

She had been placed in a corner inside of the room, and from her position she was able to peek at the monitor.

Helpless, Sanae had been staring at the screen for quite a while now.

“Koutarou... It's really Koutarou...”

When Koutarou appeared on the monitor, Sanae's heart almost stopped.

Although being a ghost and not having a heart, that's just how surprised she was.

At the same time she felt a strong sense of relief.

Having constantly been on edge, that sense of relief made Sanae go weak at the knees.

“S-Stupid me! I've decided not to get along with Koutarou! What am I getting relieved for!?”

Sanae shook her head in an attempt to erase the sense of relief she was feeling, but it wouldn't disappear that easily.

Sanae had decided to treat Koutarou as an enemy both in name and in reality.

And her resolution was only strengthened as her frustration over being captured by the ghost hunters was mixed in.

However, her resolution began to collapse as soon as she saw Koutarou.

She was hoping that maybe, just maybe...

Even though she knew that by hoping and expecting she would only get hurt even more.

“What's the meaning of this Koutarou!? If you consider me an enemy than just leave me be! What did you come here for!?”

Sanae was very perplexed, and because of that she couldn't take her eyes of Koutarou appearing on the screen.

Part 3

“This is it, the basement!”

Koutarou kicked open the door to the basement.

Using the momentum from running down the stairs to kick the door, it flew open and smashed into the wall.

With the door open, Koutarou and the others rushed into the basement.

“There she is! It's Sanae!”

The moment they entered the basement, Koutarou located Sanae.

She was in the corner the furthest away from them, still trapped inside of the cylindrical container.

“Sanae! Are you okay!?”

Koutarou shouted out to her, and Sanae roared back at him.

“Why'd you come!? I never asked you to come save me! I know you only think of me as some troublemaker!”

“Now is not the time for this!”

Koutarou was amazed at Sanae who was ignoring the situation.

But he was also relieved to hear her energetic voice.

Koutarou and the others still thought of the ghost hunters as perverts so they were worried they might have done something horrible too her.

“Sorry for getting in the way of your moving reunion, intruders”

However, Koutarou and Sanae's discussion was interrupted.

The ghost hunters placed themselves between Koutarou and Sanae.

“This ghost is ours! So go home before you get hurt!”

“That's right, just go home! It's time for kids to go to bed!”

They pumped up their chests and boldly faced Koutarou and the others.

“Impudent small time villains! If you're going to say that much, I hope you're prepared for the consequences!”

“Give us back Sanae-chan you perverts!!”

Theia and Shizuka glared at the two.

However the two of them were still grinning and showed their confidence.

“Small time villains? Perverts? Just who are you talking about? Wouldn't that be yourselves?”

“That's right! We haven't done anything wrong!”

Those words enraged Koutarou and he yelled back at them.

“What!? You dare say that after kidnapping Sanae!?”

“Just what have we done wrong!?”

Sanae had almost been groped several times and on top of that been kidnapped.

Despite that, they accused Koutarou and the others of being the villains.

And this didn't just anger Koutarou but Ruth as well.

But the hunters continued to make fun of Koutarou and the others.

“In the end we're obeying the law. There's no law against capturing ghosts right?”

“And this is our base! We bought it! But you just came in on your own!”

“On top of that, is that ghost asking for your help? She's not is she? You guys just came here despite anyone asking for you. That's trespassing!”

“Help us! Police!”

“Fufufu, in this case we're on the side of the law! In fact, we're allies of justice!”

“Ugh”

There is no law against capturing a ghost.

On top of that, Sanae herself isn't asking for help.

And on top of that there's the trespassing.

They were backed by solid arguments.

And Koutarou and Ruth were unable to argue back.

Neither could Theia nor Shizuka.

And as if to provoke Koutarou and the others, the hunters grinned and laughed.

“I see, in that case your only mistake was making us your enemies”

The only one who reacted differently was Kiriha.

“What!? What's that supposed to mean!?”

“Let me tell you”

Kiriha's normal smile vanished and a deep wrinkle formed on her forehead.

Her eyes narrowed and she pierced the hunters with her sharp glance.

And with a freezingly cold voice she spat out her words.

“We are invaders. We've never obeyed the law from the very beginning. Villains? That suits us just fine! We do as we please. As if we'd give a damn about your circumstances! We'll be taking back Sanae, oh allies of justice!”

Kiriha was angry; it was almost as if she was burning with rage.

Her sharp glance looked like it would char her enemies.

“...Kiriha-san...”

It had already been four months since she had come to room 106.

But this was the first time Koutarou had ever seen her truly angry.

“Sanae-chan is our friend Ho!”

“Even if she might not like it, we'll take her home Ho!”

The haniwas stepped out in front of Koutarou.

Unlike their hard to tell, normal, plain expressions, the expression they were showing now was one of anger.

“That's right. I had forgotten. I never cared for this planet’s laws to begin with!”

Theia regained her ambitions, readied her weapons and showed a smile that reminded one of a carnivorous animal hunting down its prey.

“And you'll regret talking big to me! My name is Theamillis Gre Forthorthe! Don't you dare forget it, even in death!”

Four months ago, that hostile intent had been directed at Koutarou.

“Your highness, I'm going!”

“Yeah!”

And four months ago, Ruth who had stopped Theia, armed herself and stepped forward to protect Theia.

“Touching my tenant was the last of your luck! A landlord and tenant are like family! Regardless of if you're a human or a ghost!”

Four months ago, Shizuka had forbidden Koutarou and the others from fighting.

And now she was about to fight herself.

She clenched her fists and took a stance, and stomped her foot to get a good feeling for the floor in the basement.

“Sanae!”

Lastly was Koutarou.

“W-What!? It's not like I asked for your help!”

“I understand! I won't forcibly take you back home!”

“Eh!?”

“In return, after I've knocked these guys I want to talk with you! Just listen to that at the very least! After that you can do whatever you want!”

“...”

Sanae didn't answer.

She didn't answer but she moved her head a little.

That was enough for Koutarou.

“Alright, then let's get this started!!”

Koutarou was usually pretty quick to get into a fight and as long as he had made up his mind, he didn't really care if he was in the wrong.

He readied his branch in the same way he would do as when he played baseball.

I see, it's just as senpai said...

Using his branch as a bat, Koutarou started thinking.

He was unusually pumped up.

He wouldn't feel like this just because he was facing an enemy.

“How good for you, you get to go on a trip”

“What!? What do you mean!?”

“Today I'm at my best! I'll send you flying to the moon!”

Koutarou felt like Babe Ruth after having struck a home run with all the bases loaded.

The one to start the fight was as expected, Theia who had a short fuse.

“Victor goes to those who move first! Blue Knight, use short distance anti-personnel missiles! Don't hit Sanae—”

“Wahaha, have you forgotten where you are!?”

But just before Theia launched her missiles, a hole opened up below her feet.

It was a pitfall the hunters had prepared beforehand.

Theia was unable to avoid the sudden trap and fell into the hole.

“Waaaaaaaaah!”

“Idiot, did you think we were completely unprepared!?”

“Idiot, Idiot”

“Q-Quit messing around!”

“Your highness!”

“Tulip, are you okay!?”

Ruth hurriedly turned back towards Theia, and Koutarou who stood next to Theia peeked into the hole from the side.

Kiriha and Shizuka were still facing the enemies but their attack timing was slightly delayed.

“Alright men, get them!”

“I'm kinda getting hungry”

“We are getting paid for this right...?”

“It's a common trap to promise something to get free labor”

“You're getting hungry because you keep thinking like that. Our obsessions are leaking out”

“Quit your talking and go!”

“Alright”

The hunters didn't miss their chance and attacked.

Their attack was the same crowd of evil spirits that had captured Sanae.

But this time their numbers were doubled.

Evil spirits of various sizes flooded out from the other room and headed toward Koutarou and the others.

“They're here! Hurry up and get out of there, Tulip!”

“Your highness, your hand!”

“S-Sorry!”

Theia grabbed Koutarou's and Ruth's hands and they pulled her out of the pitfall.

But as they were doing this, the three of them were defenseless.

Not missing their chance, the evil spirits lunged towards Koutarou, Ruth and Theia.

“Alright you guys, I'll attack them! Lend me your power!”

“That guys getting full of him just because he can attack humans directly”

“I heard his salary is pretty high too, he must be pretty conceited”

“Shush, he'll hear you”

Koutarou and Ruth had their backs turned to the evil spirits and Theia was hanging off them.

They were pretty much inviting themselves to be attacked.

“Your highness, please hurry!”

“I'm going as fast as I can”

“Waaaah, we're done for!!”

Koutarou and the others had noticed the evil spirits attacking but they couldn't just drop Theia back into the pitfall.

If they did she would be a sitting duck for the evil spirits.

And because of that the three of them were now in a major pinch.

“Don't forget about us!”

“Leave it to us, Satomi-kun!”

Kiriha and Shizuka appeared and saved Koutarou, Theia and Ruth from their crisis.

Kiriha used her haniwas to defend while Shizuka beat down the evil spirits, one at a time.

The two of them were proficient at fighting ghosts so they weren't being pushed back, but because of the ghosts’ large numbers it was a back and forth struggle.

Had the room been smaller, Shizuka would have been able to take down the evil spirits more efficiently.

But because of the large room and high ceiling the flying ghosts had the advantage against Shizuka who was unarmed.

“Tulip, now's our chance!”

“Yeah!”

As Kiriha and Shizuka were buying time, Theia pulled herself out of the pitfall.

“Ah!?”

At that time, Ruth noticed the ghost hunters as she surveyed her surroundings.

“Got you!!”

“Take this!!”

With Koutarou and the others being distracted by the evil spirits, they had snuck up and thrown a small ball each.

“Your highness! Satomi-sama!”

If Ruth hadn't noticed, the three of them would've been hit.

“Woah!?”

“What!?”

But since Ruth pushed the two of them away, she was the only one hit.

The balls hit her on the head and shoulder, creating a small sound.

“Ruth-san!?”

“Are you okay, Ruth!?”

Koutarou and Theia's faces paled as they noticed Ruth getting hit.

“....Huh?”

But Ruth herself simply tilted her head.

The balls hadn't hurt her.

She was rather puzzled since she was certain they were dangerous.

“I-It looks like I'm fine”

“Thank god!”

“Really!? But why? I thought it was an attack!”

“What did they do!?”

After confirming that Ruth was alright, Koutarou and Theia let out a sigh of relief and felt confused.

“Too bad, we only hit one”

“But one is more than enough! Wahahaah!”

“Wahahahahaha!”

The ghost hunters boasted triumphantly, seeing that confused them even more.

However, that reason for that soon became obvious.

“Eh, w-what!? Satomi-sama, look out!”

“Eh?”

Hearing Ruth's warning, Koutarou moved, and shortly thereafter a large sword swung down where he had been standing.

The solid metal blade easily crushed the concrete floor, and the blade buried into the floor.

If that had hit Koutarou it would have been, needless to say, really bad.

“Ah!? I'd die if that hits me!”

The attack took Koutarou by surprise but as he looked at his attacker his jaw dropped.

“Please run away, your highness, Satomi-sama!”

“Ruth-san!? Why!?”

“Have you gone insane, Ruth!?”

The person that had attacked Koutarou was none other than Ruth.

Even now she was preparing for another attack as she pulled her blade from out of the floor and bravely took a stance.

However, unlike her brave appearance she looked like she was about to cry.

“M-My body is moving on its own! I don't want to attack you!”

“On its own!?”

“C-Could it be because of those weird balls!?”

The only idea that popped into Koutarou's head was the balls that had been thrown at them.

“That's correct!”

“Well done on noticing, young man! An evil spirit has been packed into each of these balls! And if they hit someone they possess them and can do whatever they want!”

“Damnit, you do horrible things in the most boring ways”

Ruth had been possessed by evil spirits after getting hit by the balls and was forced to Koutarou and Theia against her will.

“Moreover you hit Ruth! Why didn't you aim for Tulip, you idiots!”

“You're getting angry over the wrong thing pleb!”

“But I can't just punch Ruth-san!”

“What!? So you're fine with punching me!?”

“Yeah”

“Hey!!”

“Now now, if you don't run that girl will cut you in half!”

As Koutarou and Theia were arguing, Ruth swung her large sword in order to tear them apart.

“Kyaaaaaa! The blade’s energy coating switch flipped on!”

A thin green light emitted from the blade.

The sword had been designed so that her blade's destructive power would increase when the energy coating was active.

“That's bad! Pleb, become my shield!”

“I obviously refuse! As if I could block that by becoming your shield!”

“Well they say that the citizens are the country's shield!”

“They don't mean it in that way!”

“Ruuuun!!”

Ruth swung her sword down while crying.

Koutarou and Theia dodged the attack just in time, thanks to Ruth desperately trying to shift the swords path.

However, the light around the blade skimmed Koutarou's stick.

And just from that the upper half of the stick was blown clean off.

After destroying Koutarou's stick, Ruth's sword buried into the floor once more.

And the blade buried even deeper than it had before.

The destructive power of the energy coated blade was incomparable to just a little while ago.

“The power is amazing”

Koutarou broke into cold sweat as he threw away his stick that had been broken in half.

“R-Ruth isn't showing any mercy...”

Theia hurriedly stood back up after having thrown herself away from the attack.

“Are you sure she's not holding a grudge because you're always being so unreasonable!?”

“Of course she's not!”

“More importantly, can't we do something Tulip!? At this rate we're going to get killed!”

Koutarou and Theia had no option but to run.

They couldn't just attack Ruth.

So in order to evade Ruth's sword they ran circles around the pitfall.

“I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!!”

And Ruth began chasing after them around the hole.

She had been crying for a while now while chasing after the two.

It may have looked like a comedy sketch to outsiders, but for the people involved it was dead serious.

“I might be able to knock her out with non-lethal weapons but the armors and stuffed things would attack her if she's unconscious! She's safer now than she would be then!”

“T-Then what about the weapon!? She's getting it from your battleship right?”

“If I turn off Blue Knight's transfer function she won't be able to use her weapon but in that case I'll lose mine as well! In reality, we'll be helpless!”

“Do it right away! It's better than not doing anything at all!”

“I got it!”

In the end, Theia listened to Koutarou, she also wanted to do something about the current situation.

“Blue Knight, activate the emergency shutdown for the weapon transfer system!”

“As you wish, my princess”

As the bracelet responded to command, Theia's and Ruth's weapons were erased.

That did nothing for Theia who was prepared for it, but Ruth lost her balance after her large sword and shield suddenly vanished.

“I'll leave the enemies to you, pleb! I'm going to catch Ruth!”

Theia turned around and rushed towards Ruth.

“Understood!”

Koutarou obeyed Theia's command and ran towards the hunters.

“Aniki, he's coming this way! This is bad!”

“Calm down, it's just one! We won't lose, two on one!”

A fierce fight started: Theia vs Ruth and Koutarou vs the hunters.

As Koutarou and Theia began their fist fights with their opponents, an odd commotion was happening over where Shizuka and Kiriha were fighting the crowd of evil spirits.

Part 4

“What's with this girl!? She can hit us bare-handed!?”

“And what's with those haniwa!? We can't move a bit because of the yellow light they're making!”

“Nobody told us the enemies are this strong!”

“Yeah! If we're going to fight someone this strong I want a higher salary!”

“Quit complaining and fight you guys!”

“I'm sure you're fine, you already have such a high salary”

“What!? Why don't you say that one more time!?”

The evil spirits were quarreling.

Because of Shizuka's and Kiriha's overwhelming strength the majority of them had begun hesitating.

The low paid evil spirits had no reason to bet their lives(?) on this fight.

“What's that...?”

“It seems like the middle management is arguing with the regular employees...”

Shizuka and Kiriha were dumbfounded by the evil spirits suddenly stopping their attacks and starting to argue.

They had the chance to attack during this scene, but the situation was just far too ridiculous and neither of them had the urge to do so.

“The enemies only seem powerful but you're not doing it seriously!”

“Are you stupid!? You could tell just by looking, they're ridiculously strong! Those girls won't get any weaker just because you of your crappy psychiatry!”

“Yeah, you're just the hunters’ dog! You've been bought by a high salary!”

“What!? Don't just ignore your own negligence! Just how much do you think I've covered for you!?”

“Get lost! We won't get anywhere by talking to you! We'll negotiate with the hunters directly!”

“Yeah! Our struggle will continue until we get a 50% raise!”

“Leave that negotiation to me. I used to be an employee of a labor union”

“Seriously!? That's really encouraging!”

“But I got fired after some illegal transactions. And my life went down from there...”

“Seriously!? That's really encouraging in a certain meaning!”

“H-Hey you guys, stop! You're going to turn on your employer!?”

“That kind of old method of thinking won't work on us. We'll use whatever we can, that's our method”

“...Now that I think about it, I don't have any obligations to those hunters either”

“Why don't you aim for a raise as well?”

“I guess I will... Nothing will come from a pointless fight”

Just like that the evil spirits gathered under the goal of getting a raise, and they approached the hunters who were still fighting with Koutarou.

“Sorry kid, just wait until we finish talking”

“Wah!?”

The evil spirits pushed Koutarou aside and faced the hunters.

Losing his balance, he rolled all the way over to Theia and Ruth who were tangling.

“What now?”

“W-Who knows...”

Koutarou shook his head.

“How is it going for you two?”

“It's just as you can see”

Theia had succeeded in restraining Ruth.

Theia easily surpassed Ruth when it came to fitness, and once the fight became that of close combat she had no fear of losing.

“I'm truly sorry, your highness”

Ruth apologized to Theia while still trying to escape her restraints.

“It's fine. Besides, it's not your fault”

“So the only problems over there...”

With Theia and Ruth's problem temporarily solved, Koutarou looked back towards the evil spirits.

“We firmly object against these unjust working conditions!”

“Raise our salary!”

“Raise it!”

“They want improved working conditions!? It seems they've learned some unnecessary things! We gathered too many evil spirits!”

“Aniki! The evil spirits are making scary faces!”

The evil spirits began voicing their protests.

The ghost hunters were puzzled by suddenly being surrounded by their supposed allies.

“Satomi-kun!”

“Koutarou!”

Shizuka and Kiriha came over to Koutarou and the others, and reported what they just heard.

“Landlord-san, what's going on over there?”

“They're fighting amongst themselves”

“Really?”

“It seems that way. They were saying something about how the risk was too large for the reward”

“It looks like the labor union finally stood up to improve the working environment”

“The labor union!?”

As Koutarou was filled them in on the situation, the evil spirits the negotiations was about to reach its climax.

“You're probably thinking you can employ cheap labor just because we're in a recession, don't you!? That won't fly!”

“Wait, that's not our intention at all!”

“Then why didn't you tell us our enemies were that strong!? We don't get paid enough to fight opponents that strong!”

“T-That's... they just happened to be strong!”

The evil spirits held the favor in the negotiations. Without the help of the evil spirits, the ghost hunters wouldn't stand a chance against Koutarou and the others, so they never had much to stand on to begin with.

“And we already know! You can sell that girl for 300 million yen!”

“How about you give some of that to us!?”

“Yeah! I'm hungry!”

“I understand where you're coming from! But I can't give you any money right away! If we don't beat those guys over there and sell the girl, we can't raise your salary!”

“That's far too irresponsible! Quit messing around! Do you really think that's acceptable for an employer!?”

“Just please wait! Once we sell that girl we'll give you your money!”

“Who would listen to that kind of deal!? Will you give us our share now or not!?”

“T-That's...”

It wasn't a question of giving or not giving, the ghost hunters had already used all of the money.

So they couldn't give the evil spirits the answer they wanted.

“... Gentlemen. I've been thinking”

At that time, an evil spirit stopped her heated up colleagues.

It was a long haired female evil spirit wearing a hostess dress.

“What is it now!? This is important!”

“I know that. That's why I stopped you. Are you fine with being blinded by the promise of money?”

“Promise of money!?”

“That's right”

She pointed at Sanae with the feather fan she was holding.

“Think about which would be better, wait for that girl to be sold off and get paid or eating her right now?”

“....Uhm...”

The evil spirits focused their glances on Sanae.

“M-Me!?”

Sanae pointed at herself in surprise.

“Just look at that stupidly dense spiritual energy and that stability. It's like she could materialize at any moment. I'd rather eat that girl than get paid”

“T-That's certainly...”

“You know, you're pretty smart!”

“Yeah, I agree with her!”

“I'm onboard with that idea too!”

“H-Hey, you guys, what are you doing!?”

“You can't eat her!”

The hunters began panicking as the evil spirits stared at Sanae with desire in their eyes.

Sanae shuddered as she was exposed to their intense stare.

She understood they were seriously planning on eating her.

“This is turning out really bad!”

Koutarou noticed the change in situation and shoved his hand into the paper bag to find a useable weapon.

They're planning on eating Sanae!? As if I'd let that happen!

Just like the hunters, Koutarou started panicking.

“Wait you guys! Don't touch her! If you do you're not getting paid!”

“We don't care about that anymore! We want to eat that and power up!”

The female evil spirit's body began swelling up.

The reason for that was because of her fellow evil spirits combining with her.

And after absorbing all of the other evil spirits, the giant female spirit sneered as she looked down on the hunters.

“Stop! That treasure is worth 300 million yen!”

“300 million yen? That's pocket money compared to that girl's spiritual energy!”

“Stop! If you touch her we'll exterminate you!”

“Yeah! We'll exterminate you!”

“Hahaha, just try it you amateur ghost hunters! Without our power you couldn't even fight, and you think you can beat us!?”

The evil spirits had combined under their desire for eating Sanae and now had considerable power.

Because of that, a single swing from that giant arm was enough to send the hunters flying.

“Agh... A-Aniki....”

“U-ugh... t-to think it would come to this... we relied too much on evil spirits...”

The ghost hunters had been blinded by their desires and didn't look at the reality.

They had finally noticed the reason for their failure but it was already too late.

They were thrown into the basement wall and lost consciousness.

“Next up is you, little kitten”

“N-No, don't come any closer!”

The evil spirit's next target was Sanae.

Frightened, Sanae starts crawling back, but her back quickly reached the container wall.

Unable to retreat any further, she began shaking her head.

“There's no need to be scared. Become one with me. It's not like you have anywhere to go either, right? With me you won't feel lonely anymore”

“No place to go—”

Those words entered Sanae through the hole in her heart.

No matter how long she waited for her parents they weren't showing up.

And even Koutarou who she was about to trust was her enemy.

If I go with these people I won't feel lonely anymore...?

Sanae was lonely being all alone.

And she was scared that she would be left alone again.

So this temptation shook Sanae.

“That's right. Open your mind and accept me. If you do that you'll no longer have anything to fear”

The evil spirit kept luring Sanae in with a gentle voice.

The only way to absorb other ghosts was to exploit the hole in their hearts.

If she would resist, her powers would be defend her and a lot of spiritual energy would go to waste.

“My mind—”

The evil spirit giant hand surrounded the container in order to absorb Sanae.

And the container easily cracked, and as the evil spirit gradually increased their power the cracks grew larger.

The evil spirit didn't crush the container right away because she was worried Sanae might put her guard up and they would lose their chance to absorb her.

However that slight delay greatly changed Sanae's fate.

“Sanaeeeeee!!”

The moment Sanae heard that voice she came back to life, she recovered from having given up.

“Koutarou!?”

The voice she had heard was Koutarou's.

Koutarou had pulled out a short sword from the paper bag and was running towards the evil spirits and Sanae.

“Tsk, you're going to get in my way, kid!?”

As Koutarou appeared, the hole in Sanae's heart began closing.

Because of that they were unable to efficiently absorb her.

This angered the evil spirit, and she bared her teeth, threatening Koutarou.

And seeing that scared Sanae even further, and she completely rejected the evil spirit.

“Kyaaaaaa!! Noooooooo!!”

Sanae no longer wanted to be absorbed by the evil spirit, instead she began screaming.

“Just wait Sanae, I'm coming to save you right now!”

Koutarou charged at the evil spirits with his short sword.

And hearing Sanae's screams pumped him up even further and he gripped the sword even harder.

“What can you do with a single sword!?”

“We'll see! The effect is short but it's supposedly very dangerous for you!”

Koutarou was holding an anti-demon sword.

'30 second holy sword – some-calibur' despite the fact that it was a mass produced product with a short life-span it held enough power to rival an actual anti-demon sword.

It was a revolutionary product.

“Damn, it's an exorcist's sword!?”

Sensing the danger from the short sword, the evil spirit let go of the container Sanae was in and attacked Koutarou.

“Woah”

“Quit moving around!”

But no matter how many times the evil spirit swung its arms, she was unable to hit Koutarou.

Koutarou quickly moved around dodged the giant arms.

“Combining seems to have made you even slower!”

“Quit your yappering!”

As Koutarou said, having become larger, the evil spirit's movements grew duller.

And she seemed to be unused at using her newly combined body.

Although she was able to take out the hunters with a surprise attack, those attacks wouldn't work on Koutarou.

“This is my victory, giant!”

“S-Stop it, anything but that sword!!”

“Take this!!”

After dodging the evil spirits attacks yet another time, Koutarou lowered his posture and thrust his entire body towards her.

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

“Did it work!?”

Without any real resistance, the short sword pierced through the evil spirits body.

The evil spirit's face warped and let out a scream of agony.

“Aaaaaaaah... eh, huh?”

But that was just for a moment, and the evil spirit's expression changed into confusion.

On top of that, she felt no pain.

“What is this? This doesn't hurt at all, kid, what's going on?”

The confused evil spirit forgot to fight and asked Koutarou.

“What!?”

Seeing that Koutarou also forgot to fight and looked down on his short sword.

“Hm?”

And he noticed a message on a label hanging off the handle of the sword.

'Returned due to malfunctions'

“It's defective!? What a joke!”

“That's my line! I thought I was going to die!”

“No, you're already dead”

“Shut up kid!... Eh!?”

The evil spirit was the first to regain her senses.

She swung their giant arm towards Koutarou who had stopped moving.

“Woah!?”

He desperately tried to dodge but he couldn't fully avoid the attack.

Koutarou managed to avoid a direct hit from the arm, but not the fan she was holding.

Suffering a direct hit from the fan, Koutarou fell down onto the floor.

“Koutarou!”

“Satomi-kun!”

“Karama, Korama, focus your efforts around Koutarou!”

“Understood Ho-!”

“Koutarou, we're on our way Ho-!”

Shizuka and Kiriha came running up to Koutarou.

And to protect the three, the haniwas stood up against the evil spirits.

“Satomi-kun, are you okay!?”

“O-ouch”

Koutarou barely managed to avoid losing consciousness.

Seeing Shizuka and Kiriha worried, he attempted to stand up.

But the two of them quickly held him down.

“Don't force yourself Koutarou, just stay down!”

“But...”

Koutarou still tried to get up but the two just pushed him down on the floor and shook their heads.

“Just leave this to us!”

“Yeah! Me and Kurano-san will beat that ghost!”

“I understand”

Hearing that, Koutarou relaxed his body.

He knew both of them were stronger than him.

They would be able to fend off the evil spirits.

And since he was certain of that, he listened to them.

“Was it really alright to say that I wonder?”

The evil spirit laughed at Koutarou and the others.

“Don't think I'm as weak as before”

“What!?”

Koutarou, Shizuka and Kiriha stared at the evil spirit.

“Koutarou, Koutarou!!”

What they saw was Sanae sinking into the evil spirit's body.

As Shizuka and Kiriha were occupied with Koutarou the evil spirit had broken Sanae's container.

“S-Sanae!!”

“Sanae-chan!!”

“Aaaah, Stooop! S-Save—”

Before long, Sanae had fully sunk into the evil spirit's body.

“Ahahahaha! I can feel it! I can feel it!! This ridiculously strong power is flowing into me!! Just how much power did this girl have!? I shouldn't have wasted my time trying to convince her and just done this from the start!”

Sanae was resisting but even then the power the evil spirit absorbed from her was enormous, and the evil spirit grew even more powerful.

The translucent evil spirit gradually became more opaque, almost as if their body turned solid.

Her body grew even larger, almost enough for her to bump her head into the five meter tall ceiling.

“Aaaaaaah, Kyaaaaaaaaaa!!”

And as the evil spirit got bigger and stronger, Sanae's screams of agony got louder and echoed throughout the basement.

“Stop! Just stop doing this!!”

“More! Give me more power! You'll become a part of me and we'll live together forever!”

But unlike the evil spirit, Sanae's body became more translucent.

Her body was normally opaque enough to look real but now it was wavering.

Anyone who saw her now would identify her as a ghost.

“This is bad! At that rate Sanae won't last!”

“Let's go Kurano-san! We need to save Sanae-chan!”

“Yeah!”

Sensing that Sanae was in danger, Kiriha and Shizuka headed towards the evil spirit.

Looking at their backs, Koutarou desperately tried to stand up.

I don't have time to be lying down. I need to... do something... or Sanae will...

However, his damaged body wouldn't listen to him.

Just getting on his knees was dizzying enough to make him feel like he was going to faint.

“Nooooooooooo! Koutarou, Koutarou!!”

“Sa,nae!!”

However, Sanae's screams seemingly gave Koutarou superhuman strength.

“Aaaaaaahhhh!!”

Pumping himself up with a scream, Koutarou stood up.

He didn't care if his body was in pain or his sight was cloudy.

And he shook his head repeatedly to clear up his mind.

“Good job on getting up, is what I'd like to say but...”

Looking at Koutarou, the evil spirits put on an evil looking grin.

It was similar to what Sanae and Theia would do but Koutarou felt it was fundamentally different to theirs.

“You were a bit too slow”

The evil spirit threw something towards Koutaruo.

“Landlord-san!? Kiriha-san!?”

It was Shizuka and Kiriha who had been hurt and lost their consciousness.

In the short time it had taken for Koutarou to stand up the evil spirit had defeated them.

The power the evil spirit had absorbed from Sanae was that large.

“So what are you going to do on your own, kid? You don't even have a weapon”

Shizuka and Kiriha were unconscious, the haniwas weren't moving, Theia still had her hands full with Ruth and he had just dropped the bag with weapons somewhere.

All Koutarou had left were the charms he normally had on him.

“Nothing much. I'll do the same as before. I'll knock you out!”

Koutarou placed a charm in each hand and took a stance with his staggering body.

“You think you can beat me in that state!? Wahahaha, you're very funny, kid!”

“Run away pleb! You're going to get killed!”

“Satomi-sama, you can't!”

Theia and Ruth shouted out, but their voices didn't reach Koutarou.

“It's my principle to finish a fight I've started”

Just wait Sanae, I'll get you out of there...

Regardless of his disadvantage or his staggering body, a fire was burning in Koutarou's eyes.

Despite driven into a corner with two strikes, Koutarou was still just like Babe Ruth today.

“I see, then die! In honor of your courage you'll get to be the first victim of my newfound powers!”

The evil spirit let out a hysterical laughter and rushed towards Koutarou.

She was planning on tearing his head clean off.

“I-I'll absolutely knock you out...”

Koutarou strongly grasped the charms and swung his fist.

He knew that even doing that, he wouldn't be able to reach the evil spirit, but he couldn't stop.

“No, don't die, Koutarou! Koutarouuuu!”

That was because even now, Sanae was crying.

She had been crying ever since she had a fight with Koutarou.

That's why even though he knew, he couldn't stop.

Even if it was impossible to win, he couldn't turn his back on Sanae.

At this point, Sanae was more important than the evil spirit.

“Ahyahyahyah, Gyahahaha. Dieeeeee!!”

The evil spirit approached Koutarou.

She thrust out both of her arms, trying to capture Koutarou's neck.

Koutarou was unable dodge that attack with his dull movement.

Had she just been a second faster Koutarou probably would have lost his head.

“Guaaah!? W-What is...!?”

But the evil spirit's arms didn't reach him.

Part 5

When Yurika reached the western-styled mansion, several minutes had passed before Koutarou and the others had entered the basement.

She had desperately escaped from the cosplay society and used tracing magic to chase after Koutarou and the others.

“W-What should I do....”

However, she was frozen in place.

The eerie sight of the mansion at night frightened her.

It was in ruins, and she knew there were lots of ghosts inside.

And she could hear screams coming from people inside.

The cowardly Yurika didn't have the courage to enter the mansion.

“M-Maybe I should go home... Satomi-san said I shouldn't force myself too...”

After standing in front of mansion for a while, Yurika eventually turned her back to the entrance.

“Let's do that! Nothing good will come from forcing myself!”

As she told herself that she headed towards the gate leading outside.

She would rather go home, tuck herself into her futon and go to sleep.

“...But...”

However, she stopped moving as she reached the gate.

She couldn't bring herself to step outside.

“....”

She silently turned her head back and looked at the frightening mansion.

Yurika desperately wanted to escape.

But something inside of her asked if that was really okay.

“Would it really be alright for me to go back on my own...?”

Yurika remembered what Harumi had told her during the sports festival.

Even if nobody else is looking, you still are. If you give up now, you'll lose to yourself in the future too. And if I lose to myself, senpai would get sad.

“I really feel like going back now would be a bad idea...”

Having prepared herself, Yurika turned around.

While holding a large can, she took several deep breaths to calm down.

“And I feel like somebody is asking for help...”

At that moment, Sanae was shouting for help.

But Yurika couldn't hear that from the outside.

Even though she couldn't hear it, she could somehow feel it.

“That's right!”

Immediately after she had prepared herself, Yurika came up with a brilliant idea.

“I'm scared facing ghosts, so what if I use large scale magic from here!?”

She was scared of entering the mansion, but she couldn't just abandon them.

In that case, she could use magic from the outside.

It was a compromise between Yurika's cowardly nature and her duties as a magical girl.

“Here we go! Angel Halo!”

Having decided what to do, she swung her cane up and down.

“Bind Undead – Modifier – Huge Area Effect – End – Casting Time Four Times!”

The spell Yurika was using would bind ghosts.

Since Sanae was with them, she couldn't use any more dangerous spells.

In order to keep down the magic consumption and increase the area of effect, she increased the time it would take for the spell to activate.

Because of that, it didn't take effect right away and instead activated several tens of seconds later.

A purple light came out from her cane, and dyed the night sky.

The light extended throughout the mansion.

Because of the time it took for the spell to activate, the purple light covered the entire mansion.

“Alright! The plan worked! Yurika Fight!”

Yurika cheered as she looked at the light enveloping the mansion.

Having unusually helped out, sadly, there was nobody around that would compliment her.

“Ah, there she is! President, I found her! Yurika's secretly cosplaying in this kind of place!”

“...Yurika, even though you said you hated it so much, you must be really pumped up about going to Comiha...”

“Eh...?”

The only ones there were her natural enemies, the cosplay society members.

As the light spread through the basement it was purple.

But as the light got brighter, it changed to pure white.

If Yurika had been here, she might have said it's the same thing as during the sports festival.

However, she was not and nobody there understood the meaning behind the light.

“Guaaaaaaaaaaaah! What's with this light!”

Although the light covered everybody equally, the only one who began writhing in pain was the evil spirit.

The spell Yurika had used was only supposed to bind the dead.

But when the light changed from purple to white, it began burning the evil spirit's body.

“What's going on...”

Koutarou looked in surprise as the evil spirit began writhing in pain.

“It's going away! My power is leaving me! Ahhhhh, why!?”

As the evil spirit was burned by the white light it began shrinking and at the same time, the opaque body starts becoming more and more translucent once more.

Koutarou didn't understand what was going on, but he did understand that the evil spirit was weakening.

“Pleb, what's with those hands!?”

“Hands?”

Koutarou first noticed as Theia pointed it out.

His hands had begun glowing.

They were glowing with the same light that was filling the room.

“The charms are glowing...?”

As Koutarou opened his hands the glow got brighter.

The charms glowing in his hand were 'Family Safety' and 'Be gone evil spirits'.

Theia who was looking on noticed how to use that light.

“Don't you get it pleb!? Those are weapons!

“It won't matter if you throw of them or punch with them! Just use them like you do against Sanae!”

“R-Right!”

If the light filling the room could harm the evil spirit, the chance that these charms could do the same was high.

Even if they didn't, with the evil spirit this weakened, normal charms could still affect her.

Realizing that, Koutarou once again grasped the charms.

“Here I come! Let me repay you for everything you've done!”

“Guaaah! D-Don't come any closer! Don't touch me!!”

The evil spirit had already shrunk to half of the size it had been.

Because of the light she was unable to move anything but her mouth.

And as the evil spirit turned translucent Sanae could once again be seen inside.

“Sanae! Can you hear me, Sanae!?”

“...K-Kouta...rou...?”

Koutarou rushed towards the evil spirit while shouting to Sanae.

And she responded with a weakened voice.

“Just wait Sanae! This time I'll get you out of there!”

“Koutarou!”

Oddly enough, Sanae wasn't suffering any ill effects from the white light.

Instead, as the evil spirit got weaker, she regained her vigor.

But even then, it didn't change the fact that she had been weakened.

All she could do was call out to Koutarou from inside the evil spirit.

“Don't come any closer! Please stop! I was wrong!!”

Seeing Koutarou's glowing fist the evil spirit began begging for her life.

The arrogance she had was nowhere to be seen.

“I don't want to get hurt! Please forgive me! Can't you just let me go?!”

“Did you do that when Sanae begged you!? Did you let her go!?”

But Koutarou didn't care for her begging.

After hurting Sanae, the evil spirit was now begging to be spared.

Her selfishness only made Koutarou even angrier.

“I'll give her back! So please forgive me!”

“No, I definitely won't forgive you! You hurt Sanae and everyone else! You can regret that on the other side!”

As if responding to Koutarou's anger, the charms in his hands glow even brighter, so much that just looking at them directly would hurt.

“This is for everyone!!”

As Koutarou roared, his left fist hit the evil spirit right in the face.

At the same time, the glow in his left fist disappeared.

The power that had gathered there had been used up.

Receiving a merciless blow, the evil spirit is thrown back.

And having received a hit to the face, she was unable to scream.

After getting punched the evil spirit shrank instantly, and was now roughly the same size as Koutarou.

“And this is—”

Koutarou's right hand began moving.

He was standing like a pitcher; he was planning on finish the evil spirit by throwing the second charm.

“Hiiiiiiiiii! Stop! Please forgive me! I can't pass on while holding a grudge!”

“—for making Sanae cry!!”

Koutarou's trained right arm roars.

The pitch he had repeatedly trained up rapidly approached the evil spirit.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

As the charm touched the evil spirit, the evil spirit's body began gradually disappearing from where the charm had touched it.

It passed through the fan the evil spirit was using to defend herself, into the hand holding the fan, going through the hand into the arm.

And as the charm touched the evil spirit's body it popped like a balloon.

Unable to withstand the light, the evil spirit finally passed on.

“Kyan!”

With the evil spirit dispersing, Sanae fell down onto the floor.

Though free, Sanae had been weakened and was unable to move as she lied on her back.

“Owowowow... Ah, that's!!”

And with Sanae in that state, another danger approached her.

The charm that had erased the evil spirit was falling down towards her.

Despite erasing the evil spirit, the charm hadn't lost its glow.

And through the light she could see the blue bag with golden embroidery that Koutarou would throw at her.

“I-I can't!!”

Normally, getting hit by the charm would only slightly burn her.

But Sanae was now weakened and the light that erased the evil spirit was still glowing.

She closed her eyes tightly as she realized that she would be forced to pass on as well.

She was too scared to watch her own body disappear.

However, things did not come to pass as Sanae had imagined.

The charm bounced off her chest and landed on her face.

“Huh...?”

Noticing that she wasn't passing on, Sanae slowly opened her right eye.

And right in front of her eyes was the white glowing charm.

“Hiiii!?”

She opened both of her eyes and held her breath.

However the white light didn't harm her, neither did the charm explode like it normally did.

“W-Why...? Doesn't this light make ghosts pass on?”

Instead, she felt that the parts of her touching the charm had something warm entering her and healed her weakened body little by little.

“And why isn't it exploding...?”

After recovering, Sanae got up and the charm on her face began rolling down.

Sanae caught the falling charm with both of her hands.

“It's disappearing...”

Almost as if sensing that Sanae had been healed, the white light vanishes, leaving behind the charm.

Why...

The light that forced the evil spirit to pass on healed her and the charm that would explode on contact with her was now resting in her hands.

The situation confused Sanae.

Looking for an answer she turned the charm around and read the embroidered words on the front.

Family...Safety...?

Embroided on the charm were the words Family Safety.

“Are you okay, Sanae?”

And before the meaning of the words sunk in, somebody called her name.

Hearing that voice, Sanae quickly looked towards the direction it came from.

“Koutarou!”

“What, you're unexpectedly energetic”

The voice belonged to Koutarou.

Koutarou dragged his injured body towards Sanae.

But after he noticed that Sanae was fine he stopped and smiled.

“Koutarou, you...”

You got beaten up so badly, and fought so desperately...

Koutarou's state and the words on the charm sunk deep into Sanae.

“For my... sake... even though I'm your enemy... for my, sake...”

Tears began flowing out from Sanae's eyes.

But she herself wasn't aware that she was crying.

Sanae pushed the charm towards her chest and just gazed at Koutarou.

I got it. I understand... just what you think of me Koutarou...

The charm that didn't hurt Sanae.

Koutarou's beaten up appearance.

His actions conveyed his intentions more eloquently than words ever could.

“W-What's wrong Sanae!? Does it hurt!? Or did the evil spirit do something!?”

Surprised by Sanae suddenly starting to cry, Koutarou approached her.

He had completely forgotten the pain he was in.

“I-It's... nothing... Besides, you're the one who did something to me...”

Sanae finally realized she was crying.

But she didn't think of stopping her tears nor did she try to wipe them away.

Instead she just let the emotions overflowing inside of her flow out.

“That's right...”

“And?”

“What?”

“You said you wanted to talk with me about something...”

“Oh yeah, right”

Having moved up to Sanae, Koutarou stopped to think.

Uhm, what did I want to talk about now again?

But Koutarou couldn't think of what he wanted to say.

Too many things had happened and his brain was overheating.

“Sorry, I completely forgot with all that's happened. I'll remember once I've calmed down, so let's go home for now, Sanae”

“You really are an idiot...”

You even said you wouldn't forcibly take me home... What do you mean by let's go home for now...

Sanae complained on the inside.

“I have no excuses”

“But I'll forgive you”

But Sanae wasn't in as bad a mood as she sounded.

“You did come to save me after all”

“Sorry”

“And Koutarou...”

Sanae strongly clasped her hands. Inside of them was the charm.

“Thank... you...”

Sanae smiled.

Her eyes were red and tears were still flowing, but she showed the energetic smile she had lost.

Part 6

There were two shadows trying to escape as Koutarou and Sanae made up.

“Oh, it looks like it ended well”

“If it ended like that it would leave a bad taste in my mouth. With this we can escape and put our minds at rest”

It was the culprits behind all of this commotion, the two ghost hunters.

They were trying to escape while Koutarou and the others weren't paying attention.

Fortunately, they managed to get out of the basement while everybody was focused on Koutarou and Sanae.

“We did it!”

“Let's hurry up and run away!”

However as the two of them were cheering, somebody stood in their way.

“...And where are you planning on going?”

It was Kiriha and her haniwas.

While everybody was focused on Koutarou and Sanae, she didn't overlook the hunters moving.

“Damnit!”

“T-They already found us!”

“P-Please, just overlook us!”

“We only want you to overlook us!”

The hunters threw away their pride and prostrated in front of Kiriha.

“Calm down. It's not like I want to harm you”

“Eh?”

“Really!?”

“Well, feelings wise I want to hurt you, so if you try to run I won't show any mercy”

“We won't run, lady!”

“We won't run!”

The two sat down as Kiriha glared at them.

They didn't care that the floor was covered in dust.

“So, what could we help you with, lady?”

“You said you were planning on selling Sanae, yes?”

“That's right, beautiful lady. That ghost is extremely rare, so she would fetch a high price”

“Yeah! We were planning on selling her for 300 million!”

Having completely accepted their defeat, the hunters explained the situation to Kiriha.

To them, pride didn't outweigh their lives.

“In that case I will buy Sanae with my 300 million”

“Eeeeeeh!?”

“Seriously!?”

The hunters were amazed by the unexpected offer.

“By 300 million you mean, 300 million!?”

The hunters couldn't believe it.

They questioned Kiriha's sanity when she offered them 300 million yen in this situation where it wouldn't be strange for them to get killed.

“Of course”

But Kiriha calmly nodded her head.

Looking at Kiriha, the elder brother's expression changed.

“...It seems you have your reasons, lady”

“Yes. Of course I don't want you coming back, but there's something else I want”

“And that's?”

“Information. I want you to give me all the information you have about Sanae. That's the condition for this deal”

“...You're quite frightening one, lady...”

She didn't choose her means when it came to her targets, she would even work with her enemies and pay them without question.

She said she was an invader, but...

The hunters’ cold sweat didn't stop.

They only just realized how dangerous the person they had faced was.

The only thing dangerous about her wasn't the weapons she was using.

“...I understand. We will do exactly as you say, lady”

“We will”

Making this woman an enemy would be bad.

It didn't take long for the hunters to come to that realization.

Dungeon and Treasure

Saturday, August 22nd

Ten days had passed since the events at the hot springs and the calendar had now reached the later half of August.

It was still summer vacation but Koutarou and Harumi had decided to use this day for club activities.

That said, they didn't go all the way to school, but instead they were using a self-study room in a library close to both of them.

As long as you booked ahead of time you could borrow an entire self-study room for yourself.

Because of that, the room wasn't particularly large, but it was enough for the knitting society.

“...And we were able to make up”

“I see, that's great”

“This is all thanks to your advice, Sakuraba-senpai”

Koutarou finished explaining the events regarding him and Sanae and bowed deeply.

He had called Harumi as soon as he got back from the trip and let her know of the results, but he felt the need to thank her in person.

That said, Koutarou didn't touch on the part that Sanae was a ghost or that she had been kidnapped by ghost hunters.

It would only serve to confuse Harumi, and that wasn't the important part.

“Thank you”

Sanae who was next to Koutarou bowed her head as well.

Aware that Harumi couldn't see or hear her, Sanae had still come along with Koutarou in order to express her gratitude.

“U-Uhm, please value your friends, okay?”

Embarrassed by Koutarou earnestly apologizing to her face, she stared down on her hands as she busily knitted away.

She had decided to try out a new knitting method today, but because of her embarrassment she had reverted to using her normal method without realizing.

“Yes, I will”

Feeling satisfied that he'd achieved his goals for the day, Koutarou began moving his own knitting needles.

Koutarou had gotten quite decent at knitting and was now working on a muffler for the coming winter.

“She called us friends”

However, Sanae slightly delayed his progress.

Instead of standing on her own she was clinging on to Koutarou's neck.

This position made it hard for Koutarou to move his knitting needles.

“It's not like we're like that, right?”

“...Then get off. It's hard to knit”

Koutarou whispered his complaints so that Harumi wouldn't hear.

Fortunately, Harumi seemed quite busy knitting so she didn't notice.

“No way♪”

“...Be reasonable”

“We're enemies, so I'll get in your way♪”

“Come on now”

Sanae refused to listen to Koutarou's complaints as she smiled.

She had been acting like that for a while now and she would often make it hard for Koutarou.

Thanks to the events at the hot springs, Sanae understood that Koutarou wasn't just her enemy.

They were enemies when it came to room 106 but apart from that she realized that he didn't dislike her.

And Sanae had now completely returned to her old, energetic self.

Instead, she was now less reserved around Koutarou and was even more energetic.

Before, Sanae would often spend a lot of time with Koutarou, but ever since the hot springs she would now always be with Koutarou as long as there was no special reason not to.

And she would tease and trouble him from time to time.

Getting in the way of his knitting was one of those troubles.

But Sanae didn't go out of her way to trouble Koutarou, she held back when the situation called for it.

In the past she wasn't be able to realize when the situation called for it, which was quite a big change.

However, Koutarou didn’t realize this change had occurred since he was still being troubled, only the problems troubling him had changed.

Having finished their club activities, Koutarou and Sanae headed back home.

As they reached room 106 Theia jumped out from the room with a pale face.

“You picked a good time to come back, pleb!”

“What, did something happen?”

Koutarou began feeling worried as he saw Theia's serious expression.

“You say something to Yurika! She refuses to put down the controller!”

“W-What, it's just something like that...”

“What do you mean by something like that!? My Blue Knight is just about face the final decisive battle! But Yurika won't change with me!”

“Why is Yurika even playing games?”

“Who knows?”

“That doesn't matter, just hurry up and come! The final battle draws closer!”

“Okay, okay... You're all so selfish, geez...”

“I want to play too. Koutarou, let's fight”

“No! I'm first!”

Theia impatiently stamps her feet on the floor as Koutarou takes off his shoes.

“We'll finish this today no matter what! How dare the boss casually drink tea with his subordinates!? He's making a fool of me and Blue Knight!”

“I got it, just calm down Tulip!”

“What kind of fool would calm down before the decisive battle!?”

“This illness is getting serious”

Having finished taking off his shoes, Theia dragged Koutarou towards the inner room.

“Waaaah! Where are they~”

Entering the inner room, like it or not, Koutarou instantly noticed Yurika.

She was crying bitterly as she sat in front of the TV.

And she stared into the screen as she desperately twiddled with the controller.

“Go on, say something, pleb!”

“Y-Yeah”

Slightly taken aback by the sight of Yurika crying whilst playing a game, Koutarou nodded at Theia and sat down next to Yurika.

“Hey Yurika, if it's so bad it makes you want to cry, you could just stop”

“You're wrong, I'm not crying because it's bad~!”

Yurika paused the game and turned towards Koutarou while still crying.

“T-Then what is it?”

“I can't find them~”

Yurika pointed towards to the TV as tears streamed down her face.

On the screen was the status screen of the game Theia was always playing.

“Who can't you find?”

“Yurika, Yurika A and Yurika B~! Theia-chan just won't recover their bodies from the dungeon~!”

“I see...”

Koutarou let out a loud sigh as he finally understood the situation.

Theia named the characters after the residents of room 106, because thinking of names was too troublesome.

That alone would have been fine, but Theia had given up on rescuing some of the characters that had fallen and instead abandoned them.

Because that was also too troublesome.

Noticing that situation, Yurika was trying to save the characters named after herself.

“Well, I guess you can't sit still with characters named after you, lying dead in a cave”

“This is your fault, Tulip”

“R-Ruth, please refill my tea. And get some for the pleb and the others as well”

Theia diverted her eyes as the topic turned unfavorable for her.

“Yes, I'll prepare it right away”

“Hey, Tulip”

“K-Kiriha, these snacks are delicious. What do you call them?”

“They're called rice crackers”

“I see. T-They have quite a mysterious texture”

Theia pretended like she couldn't hear Koutarou and began eating the tea snack Kiriha had prepared.

“What are you, a kid?”

“I-It can't be helped. They were a necessary sacrifice for the greater good”

Koutarou looked on in amazement as Theia desperately made excuses whilst gnawing on a rice cracker.

“Admit it, you just think it's a pain to go looking for Yurika”

“Yes... No, wait, that's wrong! That's not what I was thinking at all!”

“Waaaaah! You're terrible!”

“Don't make this more complicated than it already is, Sanae...”

“Why, what does it matter?”

Sanae smiled as she troubled Koutarou some more.

“More importantly, you hurry up and eat some snacks too, Koutarou! If you don't eat, I can't taste the rice crackers either!”

Sanae, still hanging onto Koutarou's back, reached out towards the tea table, grabbed a snack and pushed it against Koutarou's mouth.

“...Alright, I got it”

Koutarou reluctantly opened his mouth as Sanae threw the snack in.

“Satomi-sama and Sanae-sama sure do get along”

Ruth came back to refill the tea, she smiled as she looked at Sanae clinging onto Koutarou's back.

“We don't”

Koutarou made an offended expression; he had been the one who had been carrying around Sanae all this time.

“Is that so?”

“Now now, we all know you're actually happy~”

Sanae hugged Koutarou's back and poked his cheeks.

“Geez, you're not being honest at all~, Koutarou-chan. Your secrets are out you know~”

Despite Koutarou's unpleasant expression, Sanae kept smiling.

She was convinced that Koutarou was just hiding his embarrassment.

“Hmm~~, Fufufu~~”

Sanae cheerfully clung to Koutarou's back and she would sometimes gaze down on her own hand, in it she held a charm embroidered with the words 'Family Safety'.

This isn't exploding, so I already know how you really feel. I won't believe you no matter how many times you say you don't like it!

“If you don't stop it I'll get angry”

“Hmm hmm, that kind of threat won't work on me~♪”

Sanae stubbornly pressed her body against Koutarou, believing that would make him happy too.

“...It seems you won't learn unless you get hurt, Sanae”

Having gotten a little angry, Koutarou reached into his pocket and pulled out a charm and showed it to Sanae.

“Do it if you can. That thing won't work on me anymore”

Despite seeing the new charm, Sanae didn't flinch.

The charm in her hand didn't explode, so neither would this new one.

She no longer had a reason to fear the charms.

“...Take that”

So even though Koutarou pressed the charm onto her face, Sanae kept smiling.

A loud boom rang out.

“Gyafu!?”

As a result Sanae was blown back while still smiling.

“Fufufu, have you learned your lesson now, Sanae?”

“W-Why!? Weren't the charms not supposed to work anymore!?”

Sanae sprang up onto her feet as smoke rose from her face.

She then compared the charm she was holding with the one Koutarou was holding.

“Justice always wins! Let this be a learning experience to you, Sanae!”

She was holding the 'Family Safety' charm in her hand while Koutarou was holding the 'Be gone evil spirits' charm in his.

“I-It couldn't be...!?”

Seeing that, a theory popped into Sanae's head.

Koutarou accepts me into the room, but he still thinks of me as an evil spirit!? That's why 'Family Safety' won't explode but 'Be gone evil spirits' will!?

She felt her theory seemed to be correct.

“Aaaarrghhhhh!! Why are you always like that!?”

“Woah!?”

Sanae pounced on Koutarou.

“My, my”

“It's good that you get along so well”

As Ruth and Kiriha watched over, Sanae began choking Koutarou for the first time in ten days.

“Now I'm angry! I'll make sure you regret that!”

“C-Curse you S-Sanaeeeee!!”

And like that, the Koutarou's and Sanae's relationship reverted back to normal.

Sometimes laughing together, other times getting angry at each other and sometimes fighting it out.

That was how the two of them acted together.

“D-Don't think things will always go your way!!”

“Why can't you just say 'Sanae-chan, you sure are cute'!? You sourpuss!”

Only one thing had really changed.

That was the small charm hanging off of Sanae's neck.

It had 'Family Safety' embroidered onto it and it was now owned by Sanae.

As the commotion ensued as always in room 106, an irregularity occurred on the bridge of the Blue Knight.

An alarm suddenly began ringing out.

The sound echoed in the wide bridge and the once quiet bridge was now filled with noise.

It was the emergency alarm that had rung out for the first time during these few months.

“Detected a medium-sized rift in space-time. A 95% chance of being a warp out point”

The monitors immediately powered up and displaying the related information, such as the relative position of Earth, the moon and the sun and the precise location of the Blue Knight.

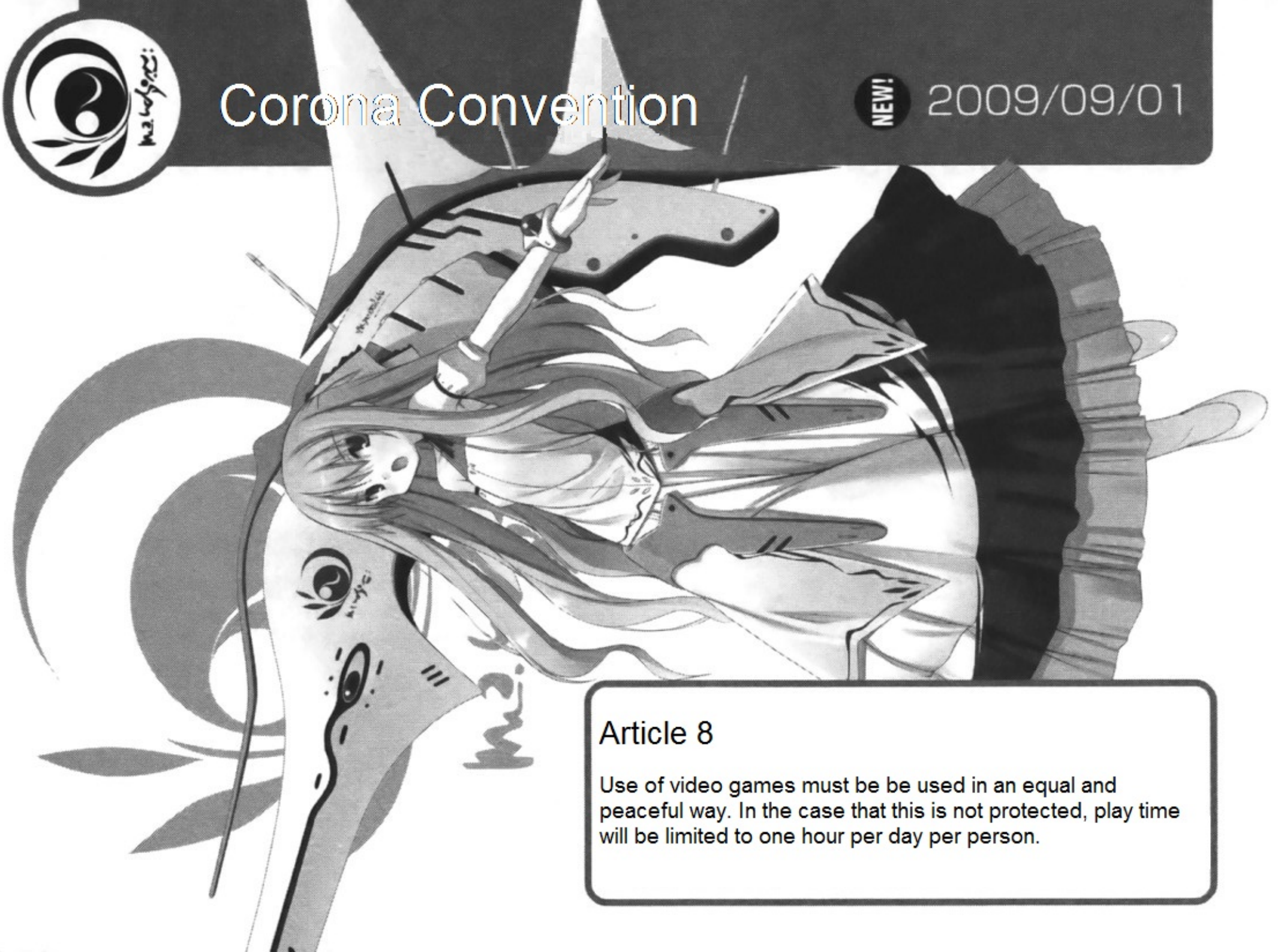
It also showed a number of graphs and tables.

“Calculated the mass of the space distortion. Warning. There is a 90% chance of being a royal class battleship. This is an emergency, my princess”

The Blue Knight used these tables, graphs and numbers and derived that a new spaceship had entered the region.

Corona Convention

NEW! 2009/09/01



Article 8

Use of video games must be be used in an equal and peaceful way. In the case that this is not protected, play time will be limited to one hour per day per person.

Afterword

Long time no see everybody, it's Takehaya. This time, I've safely delivered Volume 3. It wasn't sure if the third volume would even get published in the first place, so getting past that first trial only made me happier. This is all thanks to the support of my readers. I'd like to borrow this page to thank you all very much.

When mentioning support, I received a fan letter after the second volume hit the market. And it wasn't an e-mail but a physical letter. I get a few e-mails every time but this was the first time I ever received a letter and I was deeply impressed. By the way, it came from the south and that made me realize that my novels are being sold nationwide.

I have a little more room for the afterword this time so I would like to talk about some of the contents of this novel. Koutarou and the others go to the beach during the summer vacation. And naturally they cause a commotion, but this time it doesn't just end there. The commotion develops in an unexpected way and shakes Koutarou's and the other's relationships. Sanae is put in the spotlight and we finally get to see the Blue Knight.

The actual illustration of Blue Knight will be revealed in the next volume, but Poko-san is working hard so get your hopes up. But that might instead make it harder for Poko-san, lol. And I have two personal messages.

The first is about the child my friend was having that I wrote about in the last afterword. It was safely delivered, congratulations. But since I'm envious of his happiness, I won't congratulate him in person, I'll just write it here. Share some of your happiness with me, you bastard. Is your son and wife doing okay, you bastard? I feel like I've lost, lol.

As for the second message, I am thinking of moving at the end of the year. The place I'm living at right now is inconvenient so I was thinking of moving somewhere more convenient for my writing. Because of that my contact information will change, so it would help if those concerned would remember. I will finish it swiftly to make sure it doesn't get in the way of my work.

And finally, I would like to thank the publishers, the illustrator Poko-san, my friends who would give me advice and everyone who bought this novel. I will devote myself to be able to respond to everybody's expectations of the future. I will leave it at this. This will be the last volume of the year but, please continue supporting me next year.

October, 2009 Takehaya